

THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF INSURRECTION

ESSAYS ON TIQQUN AND THE INVISIBLE COMMITTEE



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Insurrection

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Introduction

The contemporary developmental stage of late-capitalism is undoubtedly within a period of intense transition. The 21st century has witnessed the shift to a post-Fordist understanding of capitalist economic and social relations. The critical theorist Christian Marazzi argues that:

In the Post-Fordist New Economy the distinction between the real economy, in which material and immaterial goods are produced and sold, and the monetary-financial economy, where the speculative dimension dominates investor decisions, must be totally reconceived. [...] In the New Economy language and communication are structurally and contemporaneously present throughout both the sphere of the production and distribution of goods and services and the sphere of finance, and it is for this very reason that changes in the world of work and modifications in the financial markets must be seen as two sides of the same coin.¹

1 Marazzi, *Violence of Financial Capitalism*, p 14

Here in the post-Fordist historical paradigm, financial capitalism, based on the speculation and investment of capital in purely financial realms (ie non-material services), becomes the dominant mode of profit accumulation. More importantly, its own speculative language reflects back upon the material economy further obscuring the actual economic machinations present in such relations. Through the confluence of economies of scale, the hyper-specialization of production (and consumption), and the exponential increase in the usage of new networked information technologies, post-Fordist financial capitalism marks an entirely different social, economic, and historical paradigm in the development of late-capitalism. As this new conception of capitalism relegates antiquated industrialist renderings of capitalist exploitation as largely irrelevant to this historical moment, the politics aligned against capitalism in its generalized entirety has changed relatively little since the 1970s.

The failure of the radical left to seriously contest post-Fordist late-capitalism, has stultified its position and has frozen all anti-capitalist rhetoric and discourse, pushing the left into a self-reflexive circle that cannot escape its own

irrelevance. The anarchist slogans of yesteryear to “smash the state” and the communist insistence on viewing labor as the revolutionary subject all fail to see such revolutionary posturings for what they are: mere anachronisms. Labor as a definitive class with singular attributes no longer exists—and the failure of such a subjectivizing politics suggests that it indeed never existed. To understand the state as something objective and external to the perceiving subject is to ignore the ways that the contemporary “welfare state” has so thoroughly integrated its subjects through affective measures and apparatuses that the state now paradoxically reinforces its domination through its apparent disappearances and liberalization. For all of these reasons and more, the radical left today speaks a language of resistance that is a paltry shadow of the rhetoric it used to combat industrial capitalism, a project which ultimately ended in dismal failure during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

This unequivocal defeat has had serious ramifications for the understanding of late-capitalism as a social episteme in the 21st century. First, politically, it appears on all fronts that capitalism has triumphed. The specter of communism no longer haunts the world and the

prophecies of thinkers like Francis Fukuyama seem to have become manifest. Secondly, metaphysically, this new stage of late-capitalism has called into crisis the nature of being itself. As commodity relations become totalizing, social relations between individual beings become obfuscated. The metaphysical nature of the world appears in the Heideggerian sense as a representation—the “world as picture.” Post-Fordist late-capitalism is accompanied by a de-realization of the world, and subsequently a marked disjunction between meaning and life. The metaphysics of post-Fordist late-capitalism finds its historical precedents in the rationalism of post-Enlightenment thought. Capitalism as a modernist invention, with its incessant need to proliferate and accumulate, is the logical extension of Enlightenment thinking as embodied by its progressive historicism, entrenching of the “subject” and “subjecthood,” and its attempts to rationalize the experience of being and quantify the whole of the world itself. Thus, post-Fordist late-capitalism operates on two distinct but mutually dependent planes. It depends on the mythology of its unquestioned dominance as well as the way that life and being itself within this stage of late-capitalism has become fundamen-

tally altered. Thus, given this context, positing anticapitalist alterities in the 21st century is no longer merely a question of politics; instead, it is a political question that is also explicitly meta-physical in character.

Enter *Tiqqun* and The Invisible Committee. In the midst of a period in anticapitalist history largely preoccupied with the anti/alterglobalization movement, which saw its most significant manifestation in the “summit protests” against the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999 and Genoa in 2001, a journal of radical political philosophy called *Tiqqun* emerged from France. Largely unconcerned with the anti-globalization movement, the two issues of *Tiqqun* represent a unique emergence of political and philosophical thought addressing capitalism as it is in its post-Fordist late-capitalist incarnation, something that very little communist or anarchist theory was doing at the time. After the 1999 publication of *Tiqqun: Conscious Organ of the Imaginary Party—Exercises in Critical Metaphysics* and the 2001 publication of *Tiqqun: Organ of Liaison within the Imaginary Party—Zone of Offensive Opacity* the group dissolved in 2001. In 2007 a group in France calling itself The Invis-

ible Committee published *The Coming Insurrection*, a reference to Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*. The Invisible Committee and Tiqqun are distinct but interrelated theoretical projects, as a few individuals that were involved with Tiqqun went on to write as The Invisible Committee. After the Semiotext(e) English translation and publication of *The Coming Insurrection* in 2007 and the subsequent Semiotext(e) translations/publications of longer essays culled from the two original journals, *Introduction to Civil War*, *This is Not a Program*, and *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*, Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee developed a wider readership in the English-speaking world of radical political theory, anarchism, and left-communism.

Paradoxically, both Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee are deeply indebted to the political theory and continental philosophy that clearly inform their writing, but also decisively break with much of this thought as well, through a relentless critical evaluation of such work. Refreshingly, they appropriate certain theoretical concepts and ideas from thinkers and schools of thought before them—taking what they find valuable to their own unique argument while abandoning the rest. In this sense, Tiqqun and

The Invisible Committee, while clearly informed by academic discourses (such as traditional metaphysics, theories of sovereignty, the study of biopolitics and disciplinary practices, etc), are staunchly defiant of the academy's monopoly over political thought. It is at once an appropriation, recontextualization, and ultimately a liberation of certain theoretical concepts from the tautological trap of academia and their subsequent projection into the world. In this way, *Tiqqun* and *The Invisible Committee* represent a critical synthesis of thinking as disparate and diverse as anarchist thought, Italian autonomist-Marxism from the 1970s, French ultra-gauche communism, the squatter's movement in Europe in the 1980s, and the Situationist International. Their most obvious appropriations from continental philosophy and traditional political theory include: Giorgio Agamben's use of the "whatever singularity," apparatuses, and the idea of "being-in-common"; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the "war machine" and rhizomatic networks; Martin Heidegger's critique of traditional metaphysics and his hermeneutics of Being; Alain Badiou's ontology of the "event"; Georges Bataille's transgression and nihilism; Carl Schmitt's political theology and work on

sovereignty; and Walter Benjamin's thought on messianic history and "divine violence." For the purposes of this study however, the most important concepts Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee have appropriated from continental philosophy are Michel Foucault's "biopower," Antonio Negri's "Empire," and Guy Debord's "Spectacle." Each of these concepts reappears throughout this study.

Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee use Foucault's concept of "biopower" to identify the constellation of technologies, methodologies, and apparatuses of post-Fordist late-capitalism that quite literally control whole populations of individual bodies. Biopower here is a disciplinary mode of domination framed entirely within the affirmative; it is concerned with fostering life through its very management. Thus, institutions that deal with birth, death, medicine, public health, risk evaluation and management are all operating as a means of exerting control and subjugation through the rational and empirical management of biological life-itself. This form of subjugation, as opposed to disciplinary practices that are clearly punitive and life-threatening, is the *modus operandi* for post-Fordist late-capitalism, as the management and maintenance of life-

itself becomes the securing of labor productivity, the maximization of labor efficiency, and the prolongation of capitalism.

Tiqqun and *The Invisible Committee*'s use of Negri's concept of "Empire" eschews traditional modernist interpretations of imperialism or nationalism in favor of a postmodern totalizing control that supersedes all pretensions to difference in ideology, difference in political structuring, and difference amongst nation-states. Instead, Empire is the liquidation of such political differences in favor of a totalizing control of society or civilization itself, in which all social relations are completely subsumed by post-Fordist late-capitalism. Tiqqun and *The Invisible Committee* use this term to point to the failures of political organizing based on the idea that controlling a nation-state through socialist means is an effective attack against the global hegemony of post-Fordist late-capitalism. This criticality argues that even so-called "socialist" or "social-democratic" welfare-states are merely aspects of Empire as a whole, and any arguments that such nation-states are fundamentally more just or better than more autocratic nation-states are largely irrelevant. Empire points to the reality underneath the persistent myth of

the nation-state in a postmodern age, as it fundamentally argues that through the expansion of economic interdependency (multinational corporations), the rhizomatic proliferation of global communication and governmental control (supra-national organizations that trace their lineage to the Bretton Woods conference), and the unquestioned dominance of capitalist ideology and its commensurate social relations—there are no longer any insularities of isolationist non-capitalist existence. This line of thinking provides only one exit: the complete negation of Empire in its totality.

Finally, Tiquun and *The Invisible Committee*'s use of Debord's concept of the "Spectacle" is a condition of society in which commodity-relations (as first outlined by Marx) completely supplant and obfuscate the social-relations interred within them. The Spectacle is the condition that arises in society when authentic social relations have been replaced by mere representation. It is the complete realization of commodity fetishism, a totalizing view of "the social," in which relations between people have been supplanted by relations between things. This in turn leads to individual and collective alienation and the obliteration of au-

thenticity. It also complicates temporality itself, as the historicity within the Spectacle is reduced to an eternal present—with no sense of the future or past. The Spectacle is the form of social existence, in which social relations are entirely mediated by images and representation.

This study finds both its impetus and locus at this point, in exploring the image and representation of life itself within post-Fordist late-capitalism. This study starts from the premise that culture cannot be separated from politics. If, as Tiqqun and *The Invisible Committee* argue, under Empire, biopower, and the Spectacle, the metaphysical character of life has thoroughly changed, then the evaluation of its concomitant cultural forms must necessarily change as well. This study aims at viewing Tiqqun and *The Invisible Committee* in relation to the production and evaluation of cultural forms from the contemporary historical vantage point of post-Fordist late-capitalism.

The body of work that this study will examine suggests that prefigurative politics is unable to provide any real way to understand life after capitalism. This study is simultaneously an engagement with the past and an elucidation of the conditions in the present that if

actualized can, or as Tiquun and *The Invisible Committee* argue will, bring about the possibility of a future—an exodus from capitalist nihilism. This study examines the possibility of transcendence and the cultural forms where we can see such potentiality. This study is comprised of a series of theoretical interactions and intersections, for it is precisely through such acts that the possibility of transcending capitalism begins to be manifest. Each of the seven chapters deal with a particular interaction between Tiquun or *The Invisible Committee* and other cultural forms—mostly theoretical or philosophical. This project of engaging Tiquun and *The Invisible Committee* with other cultural, theoretical, and philosophical works is intended to show that while the oeuvre of Tiquun and *The Invisible Committee* seems to mark a definitive break with much previous radical political theory, their thought depends on the critical evaluation, synthesis, and appropriation of earlier theorizations of existence within capitalism. As this is necessarily the case for all theory, it also allows for a reading of earlier theory in which the seeds of insurrection lay dormant, waiting for the right conditions for their ruptural emergence—and what better con-

ditions than ours, here at the “end of history”?

Each chapter herein is to be taken as an equal contribution to the analysis of a constellation of insurrectional tendencies that begin to emerge in the examples of cultural works juxtaposed against writings by Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee. If cultural forms are always necessarily bound and contextualized by the larger historico-political moment from which they emerge, then this study underscores earlier theoretical and cultural thought (whether it belongs to Benjamin, Heidegger, Adorno, Foucault, or even someone like Arnold Schoenberg) that possesses mirrored reflections of the ruptural possibility of a future after the concurrent negation and transcendence of capitalism. These ruptural possibilities permeate the aesthetics, theory, and philosophy in the body of work analyzed in this study—and the evaluation of the contemporary moment by Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee finds itself being similarly articulated in what prove to be commensurate antecedents.

In encountering the fundamental finite limits to both the progress of late-capitalist development and the failures and limits of anti-capitalist struggle, a series of questions (material, economic, and metaphysical) arise for

Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee. The secondary aim of this study is exploring the limitations of the thinking of Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee's, by placing them in conversation with other theory, philosophy, and cultural works, specifically those of Schoenberg, Adorno, Horkheimer, Foucault, Bataille, Benjamin, Bachelard, Heidegger, and Nietzsche. All such criticality and skepticism issues from a position of evaluation, sympathetic to and commensurate with the trajectory of thought demonstrated in Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee. Ideally, such juxtaposition will address, critique, and ultimately supplement (by buttressing their work through resonances with earlier theories) the flaws or unresolved problems within the thinking of Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee. This study makes no pretensions as to "fill the gaps in," but to explore the "unresolvable" within Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee as a worthwhile political project—as this study does with the explicit hope of refining a theory (through its critical evaluation) that is explicitly inclined toward action.

One irreconcilable problem arising in the work of Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee is the idea that a categorical dismissal of pre-

figurative politics and any semblance of revolutionary agency tends toward a position of critical purity. For Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee, localization of struggle means nothing in this context unless it becomes a totalizing force capable of both the negation and transcendence of capitalist relations in its entirety (ie expanded beyond purely economic relations to social and metaphysical relations as well). They seem to have no qualms with the mystical undertones in their own “cleansing” hermeneutics, and this often forces them into a fallacy of exhaustive hypotheses. An exploration of the way in which, through their own pretensions towards totalization, this position lends itself to a certain obstinacy tempered by false dichotomization is taken up in Chapter 1: “Critical Purity or Insurrectionary Agency: The Culture Industry and *The Coming Insurrection*.”

The contradictions embedded within a subject-less conception of collective agency based on ethical similarities is dealt with in Chapter 5: “‘The Annihilation of Nothingness’: Tiqqun’s Transcendence of Nihilism Through Nihilism, Georges Bataille’s Conception of Death, and David McNally’s Living-Dead.”

Another major problem is the conclu-

sion that Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee ultimately arrive at through their critiques of the “revolutionary subject,” the process of subjectification (subjectivation), and subject-hood itself. While such critiques are by no means original (their debt to anti-humanist philosophy is made explicit in Chapter 3: “Deserting Empire, Deserting Humanism: Anti-Humanist Critiques of the Individual, Absolute Knowledge, Rationality, and History in Tiqqun’s *Introduction to Civil War*”), their condensing the subject to a non-subject, a mere “ethical inclination” or “form-of-life,” calls attention to the necessity of a new language and metaphysics of insurrection. Yet, the problem in this becomes readily apparent. By arguing that such a new language and metaphysics is at once the cause and the result of the insurrectionary negation of Empire (and its concomitant forms of power dynamics and social relations), envisaging such a break—both ruptural and restorative—and such a non-subject becomes incredibly difficult within the material particulars of the present moment; a moment that they argue is fully mediated by late-capitalist domination. This problematization of exteriority and internality is taken up in Chapter 6: “The Poetics of Alienation: Gaston

Bachelard's 'The Dialectics of Outside and Inside' and Tiqqun's *Theory of Bloom*." The problems that arise in this kind of critical evaluation of Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee almost all have to do with the explicit metaphysical characterization of their polemic. In their insistence on the immediacy involved in the realization of communism in the here and now, a certain ethos of immanence seems to manifest. This is problematized by Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee's insistence that their anti-program program is transcendent in its very nature (in the Benjaminian sense). This problematization of the relationship between transcendence and immanence in an explicitly metaphysical context is taken up in Chapter 7: "The Politics of Transcending Traditional Metaphysics: A Heideggerian Reading of Tiqqun's 'What is Critical Metaphysics?'"

Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee ultimately posit an understanding of post-Fordist late-capitalist power dynamics which eschews any logic of revolutionary programs, orthodoxy, and prefigurative politics. While some may criticize as naïvely tautological their insistence that only an insurrectionary rupture with the present whole of "commodity modernity" or Empire

can transcend the misery of everyday life within capitalism, it nonetheless is the case that their analysis of the contemporary moment presents an incredibly insightful and poignant understanding of how capitalism has evolved. Their elucidation of the precise ways that the terrain of late-capitalism has changed in the 21st century takes on culturally evaluative dimensions. My larger purpose is to focus explicitly on the ways that we can read Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee's political analysis as a critical evaluation of life and thought within 21st century capitalism.

Critical Purity or Insurrectionary Agency: The Culture Industry and *The Coming Insurrection*

While the Frankfurt School's essentially pessimistic view precludes any sort of prescriptive action against the totality of late-capitalism, The Invisible Committee have arrived at different evaluative positions regarding resistance to the totality of late-capitalism. The Invisible Committee claims that it is possible to act against what they call Empire (appropriating and elaborating upon the term coined by Italian autonomist-Marxist theorist Antonio Negri). While Frankfurt School theorists like Theodor Adorno have argued that the sociohistorical moment in which capitalism could be effectively subverted on purely materialist terms has already come and gone, The Invisible Committee argue for a form of immediate communism that is at its core part of an explicitly insurrectionary practice. The Invisible Committee's analysis of the totalizing

control of late-capitalist social relations is very similar to that of the Frankfurt School, but the Committee goes further, as they posit new forms of collective agency that arise out of immediate and direct contestation with the sociopolitical apparatuses of Empire.

In their 1947 book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno assign political significance to the myriad of apparatuses responsible for the commodification of mass culture. This demarcation of a productive, and inherently capitalistic, intent behind the construction of culture itself takes Marx's theories on the socioeconomic ramifications of rampant industrialization, and transposes them onto the cultural plane. It is a totalizing view denying any authenticity within mass culture. Their term for this homogenizing and mechanistic process is the "culture industry:" a network of apparatuses that are essentially the components of commodity-driven entertainment markets. For Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, the ways that individual consumers are marketed to prove to be just as relevant as how the classic proletarian has her/his labor-value exploited by the bourgeoisie. In their work on the culture industry, Horkheimer and Adorno

recontextualize mass culture and its artifices as a legitimate site of contestation against late-capitalist hegemony.

Taking Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that "the whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry"², The Invisible Committee, in their notorious 2007 treatise, *The Coming Insurrection*, explicitly acknowledge a political climate in which "the present offers no way out".³ They describe a world where the culture industry's fabrication of existence has extended into almost every facet of lived experience, creating a social environment that is at once a complete spectacle *and* hostile to authentic collectivity. In response to this proliferation of fabricated mass culture, The Invisible Committee argues that "there will be no social solution to the present situation"⁴—and thus, they argue that the only recourse is insurrection.

The Invisible Committee takes the post-Marxist line first argued by the Frankfurt School to its logical conclusion. The fabrication and mass commodification of cultural forms within

2 Horkheimer, and Adorno. *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, 1226

3 The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, 23

4 *ibid* 25

the amalgamated mass of productive social networks that is the culture industry has become not merely a prevalent force within the lived experience of late-capitalism, but the totality of experience itself. The Invisible Committee argues that individuals are fully implicated within a rhizomatic structuring of exchange relations (economic and social), within which flow relations of consumption, production, and most importantly, power. This is very similar to Horkheimer and Adorno's notion that within the culture industry and late-capitalism as a whole, "something is provided for all so that none may escape; the distinctions are emphasized and extended."⁵ There is no longer an effective "outside" to this totality of the culture industry and perhaps even the idea of culture itself is a completely constructed notion entirely delineated by late-capitalism. The Invisible Committee argues that even movements, activist-oriented or otherwise, that ostensibly attack the pervasive hegemony of late-capitalist ideology and social relations are merely aspects of this totalizing nature of the Spectacle (in the sense of the word as used by Situationist theorist Guy Debord). In addition, while such movements occupy the affective representation of being po-

⁵ op cit, *The Culture Industry*, 1225

sitionalities against late-capitalist relations, in this critical view they merely end up reifying the dominance of late-capitalist Empire.

Such a critical view of alter-identities can be read at both the macro-political level and the individual-subject level. At the macro-political level, The Invisible Committee adopts a line similar to most post-Marxist theoretical strains, albeit with a much more cynical tone: denouncing the idea that the so-called “socialist bloc” was a political positionality aligned against late-capitalist ideology. They claim that the

collapse of the socialist bloc was in no way a victory of capitalism; it was merely the breakdown of one of the forms capitalism takes. Besides, the demise of the USSR did not come about because a people revolted, but because the nomenklatura was undergoing a changeover.⁶

Thus, The Invisible Committee’s essentially negative critique of the supposedly oppositional position represented by the “socialist bloc” in the historical schema of late-capitalist development argues that such “socialist” regimes as those in Russia, China, or Cuba, were/are merely other incarnations of the structural forms late-

⁶ op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 66

capitalism can take. Their claim that the fall of the USSR came about not because of Western capitalism's supremacy, but because of internal fissures in the privileged caste of Communist Party functionaries (*nomenklatura*), underscores the way that representation and signification function within The Invisible Committee's inherently anti-postmodern conception of the political landscape. They argue that *all* political persuasions are actually late-capitalist constructions.

The Invisible Committee's second critique of positions that claim to oppose the hegemonic discourse of late-capitalism is at the level of the individual subject. They claim that almost all individual subject-based identities that polemically assert their alterity are actually fallacies already reified and circumscribed by late-capitalism at their very creation. Implicit in this claim is that late-capitalist Empire already contains within it, or at best allows and tolerates, individual subjectivities that claim to be outside its influence. To show that such subject-positions are actually not revolutionary at all, they point to the "negative growth" movement in contemporary France. "Negative growth" (*décroissance*) is

a French left-ecological movement which

advocates a reduction in consumption and production for the sake of environmental sustainability and an improvement in the quality of life.⁷

Similar to the “deep ecology” movement in the United States, The Invisible Committee critiques “negative growth” as a move away from the classical Marxist conception of economics “as a science” to seeing it now “as a morality”⁸—both of which The Invisible Committee derides equally.

Whereas the failed projects of the socialist bloc were grounded in the belief of Marxist-Leninism’s empirical objectivity, The Invisible Committee claims that these positions of false-consciousness have now invaded the discourse around what constitutes an appropriate ethical position toward the destructive nature of Empire. They argue that these positions turn into “a masquerade”⁹, dangerously asserting that one can effectively challenge and overcome the horrors of life under Empire by making correct moral choices of consumption—in short, through subtle lifestyle shifts. The Invisible Committee argues that the culture industry encourages this fallacy through such polemic utterances as the

7 *ibid*, 68

8 *ibid*, 68

9 *ibid*, 68

following:

There is only one alternative to the coming apocalypse: reduce growth. Consume and produce less. Become joyously frugal. Eat organic, ride your bike, stop smoking, and pay close attention to the products you buy. Be content with what's strictly necessary. Voluntary simplicity.¹⁰

This creates new subject-identities in reaction to the progressive linearity of the historical process, nostalgic glances to a more harmonious past, romantically tied to the idyllic belief in the absolute dichotomy between the metropolis and nature, and informing what is inherently a moralist position. The Invisible Committee critiques this ahistorical, moralizing view, arguing that

Any exhortation to return to the past is only the expression of one form of consciousness of the present, and rarely the least modern. [...] It is part of the forced march towards a modernized economy. Capitalism got as much as it could from undoing all the old social ties, and it is now in the process of remaking itself by rebuilding these same ties on its own terms. [...] This new humanity requires a new economy

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 69

that would no longer be a separate sphere of existence but, rather, its very tissue, the raw materials of human relations.¹¹

Thus, for The Invisible Committee, capitalism is at a stage of development in which all pre-capitalist social relations have been completely recuperated and appropriated by its own totality.

The notions of an authentic non-capitalist community or a non-capitalist subject cannot even be constituted in the hostile terrain of this social existence. The Invisible Committee argues that the totality of capitalism is now in the process of reconstituting, and in effect creating, new social relations that are entirely fabricated constructions flowing from speculative conceptions of what pre-capitalist relations looked like. The term they use for this new and diffuse recontextualization of *the social* is the “bioeconomy”—a term that

requires a new definition of work as work on oneself, a new definition of capital as human capital, a new idea of production as the production of relations, and consumption as the consumption of situations; and above all a new idea of value that would

11 *ibid*, 70-71

encompass all of the qualities of beings.¹² Here, *The Invisible Committee* evokes Michel Foucault's conceptual work on biopower.

For Foucault biopower is the way in which systems of power (and the institutions that are a part of these systems) attempt to literally control bodies (the term "body" being used here instead of the much more philosophically loaded term "individual"). Foucault claims that the "function of these institutions of subjugation was that of controlling not the time of individuals but simply their bodies".¹³ If older conceptions of power aimed at the control of bodies through physical coercion such as slave-labor or threats of death or imprisonment, biopower functions by guaranteeing an individual's right to existence. Thus, individuals are beholden to a psychology that ultimately imprisons them within a false sense of individual agency. These systems grant just enough of a semblance of agency to individuals to allow these individuals to arise every day, exchange their physical or intellectual labor in return for the economic means to enter into the "choices" purportedly offered by commodity culture and the culture industry. These systems also affirm the tacit

¹² *ibid.*, 71

¹³ Foucault, Michel. *Power*. Ed. James D. Faubion, 78

way in which the young girl is completely socialized within patriarchal hegemony, to where even the most marginal freedoms along lines of gender “equity” are seen as meaningful strides towards some nebulous conception of universal human rights. All of these are manifestations of biopower and the way in which it exerts control over the material existence of bodies.

Foucault, and *The Invisible Committee* after him, argue that the aim of the institutions forming this rhizome of power-relations—the “factories, schools, psychiatric hospitals, prisons”—is not “to exclude, but rather, to attach individuals”.¹⁴ It is precisely through this attachment, or the creation and maintenance of affective ties, that late-capitalist power relations exert control on individual bodies. These ties that implicate individuals within a mediated environment of totalizing control are more coercive than the classical conception of hierarchical power relations because individual and collective existence is predicated on what is granted to the individual—thus, it is not a power that prevents agency, but rather, it is one that *allows*. *The Invisible Committee* argues the

attachment of the French to the state—the

¹⁴ *ibid*, 78

guarantor of universal values, the last rampart against the disaster—is a pathology that is difficult to undo. It's above all a fiction that no longer knows how to carry on.¹⁵

Thus, these affective ties created by the complex web of apparatuses that inscribe control onto the bodies of individuals are nonetheless real fictions, in the sense that the results they produce are often material indicators of coercion and oppression (imprisonment, murder, poverty, etc). Conversely, they are fictions in the sense that the interdependent existence of the control-apparatuses that implicate individuals seems so totalizing only because it is the context in which most individuals are socialized; it is not the only context imaginable.

This notion of biopower is a marked shift within the power-relations of confinement, which initially as Foucault argues “excluded individuals from the social circle,” but now has “the function of attaching individuals to the producer’s apparatuses of production, training, reform, or correction”.¹⁶ Thus, inclusion, toleration, and acceptance by these social apparatuses does not constitute reformist success (ie the liberal

¹⁵ op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 12

¹⁶ op cit, *Power*, 78

notion of “speaking truth to power”), but rather a totalizing recuperation into late-capitalist schema. If resistance is tolerated, it is recuperated. If it is recuperated it is not actually resistance. Thus, for The Invisible Committee insurrection is a means to effectively destroy all the affective ties that biopower exerts onto individual and collective bodies.

Another aspect of The Invisible Committee’s critique of late-capitalist Empire is grounded in the idea that the codification of existence happens along geospatial lines. Informing this argument is a strong critique of the very notion of ecology and the environment itself. They claim that as a system of signification, and subsequently control, “ecology is the discovery of the decade”.¹⁷ Thus, the incessant clamoring about the ecological perils that the entire world collectively faces are actually a part of a more nuanced discourse—namely that the practices resulting in environmental devastation and the ostensible solutions to said devastation are not mutually at odds, but rather, mutually interdependent. Taking this claim to its furthest limits, The Invisible Committee asserts that “there is no ‘environmental catastrophe.’ The catastrophe is

¹⁷ op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 73

the *environment itself*.¹⁸ For The Invisible Committee, “environment” is the lack, the absence, of anything with even a modicum of dynamism. Their use of the term denotes a sterile stasis within certain modernized locales that seems to be the effective denial of desire, which Horkheimer and Adorno argue is central to the machinations of the culture industry.

Horkheimer and Adorno gesture toward this more totalizing schematization of spatial materiality itself when they argue that

in every product of the culture industry, the permanent denial imposed by civilization is once again unmistakably demonstrated and inflicted on its victims. To offer and to deprive them of something is one and the same.¹⁹

It is only when the culture industry’s homogenizing impulse expands through diffuse conduits (ie biopower) into every facet of everyday life does existence itself become a complete deferral, a total deprivation of desire. The Invisible Committee claims that

it’s only we, the children of the final dispossession, exiles of the final hour—who

¹⁸ op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 74

¹⁹ op cit, *The Culture Industry*, 1231

come into the world in concrete cubes, pick our fruits at the supermarket, and watch for an echo of the world on television—only we get to *have an environment*.²⁰

Ecology here becomes a system of signification, a means to *re-present* an absence. If one is willing to accept this claim, it follows that ecology is a construction of Empire—and if it is a means to deny or obfuscate an inherent lack, then as *The Coming Insurrection* posits: “Ecology isn’t simply the logic of a total economy; it’s the new morality of capital”.²¹ Ecology’s system of control is its moralizing appeal as authority. It becomes merely another system within the rhizomatic totality of systemic control and institutionalized social relations that The Invisible Committee calls Empire.

Appeals to ecology as a *natural* neutrality merely mask the way in which ecology can act as an almost divine notion, which by its very existence precludes any objection to it. When ecology is granted *carte blanche*, the coercive qualities of late-capitalism can effectively occupy ostensibly neutral or non-discursive positions that nullify all contestation. In effect, ecology be-

20 op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 74

21 ibid, 74

comes the perfect cover for the expansion of late-capitalist control into new modes of being.

Without ecology, nothing would have enough authority to gag every objection to the exorbitant progress of control. [...] Everything is permitted to a power structure that bases its authority in Nature, in health and in well-being.²²

Thus, in the same way that monarchical control justified itself in the doctrine of divine-right, or the welfare-state saw itself as the logical outcome of Enlightenment values, late-capitalist Empire can use ecology as one of many appeals to secure its hegemonic position. Just as Horkheimer and Adorno are adamant in their distrust of post-Enlightenment progress, The Invisible Committee interrogates ecology's neutrality and positive-moralism through the argument that capitalism occupies both poles of a dialogic binary that is not actually at odds with itself. The Invisible Committee presents a view of late-capitalism as *both* the perpetuation of conflict, crisis, and contradiction, and the subsequent management and normalization of this seemingly chaotic state.

To challenge this systemic management,

²² *ibid*, 78

at least in terms of ecology, The Invisible Committee argues that

everything about the environmentalists' discourse must be turned upside-down. Where they talk of 'catastrophes' to label the present system's mismanagement of beings and things, we only see the catastrophe of its all too perfect operation.²³

Here again, one must ask whether signification within an entirely constructed social reality can indicate anything beyond this social-field. Ultimately, The Invisible Committee believes that this is indeed possible, and it is precisely through these spaces of catastrophe or rupture that a new collective-becoming can be manifested. They claim that,

what is called 'catastrophe' is no more than the forced suspension of this state, one of those rare moments when we regain some sort of presence in the world.²⁴

Thus, for The Invisible Committee, the question of *How is it to be done?* is not answered by the creation of new alternatives (ie alter-political movements or organizational building) to manage and suspend environmental and social "ca-

23 *ibid*, 80

24 *ibid*, 81

tastrophes” but rather, how to exacerbate them to the point of completely negating late-capitalism’s ability to manage this chaos. This is the moment of insurrection: the new ontologies arising from catastrophe where

we are forced to reestablish contact, albeit a potentially fatal one, with what’s there, to rediscover the rhythms of reality.²⁵

In response to the social context of Empire, The Invisible Committee argues that insurrection is the only possible recourse. Before attempting to analyze the term “insurrection” as an ontological construction, one must first understand how The Invisible Committee’s use of the term refers to a set of specific practices and actions. *The Coming Insurrection* is a two-pronged polemic. The first half is an evaluation of the current socio-political context of late-capitalist Empire, while the latter half is a prescriptive summary of the variety of positions the pro-insurrectionary can hold. The first half is divided into chapters titled as numbered circles. This allusion to Dante Alighieri’s nine circles of hell is significant, as is that fact that the chapter demarcation stops at the Seventh Circle—in Dante’s *Inferno*, the circle of violence—

²⁵ *ibid*, 82

and goes no further. This implies that the contemporary social moment has not yet moved beyond the violent Seventh Circle; suggesting that the insurrectionary moment (that of new ontological truth) must necessarily be born from a totality of violence. After the seven circles of descriptive evaluation, the narrative becomes a nuanced primer for insurrection. The four final chapters are calls to action: “Get Going!,” “Find Each Other,” “Get Organized,” and “Insurrection.”

The first, “Get Going!,” is posited against the limitations of temporality itself. While much of the political rhetoric of the broadly defined “radical left” treats revolution as the logical outcome of ideological conflict (historically being class-based) which must be *built toward*, The Invisible Committee adopts a much more extreme position. They argue that insurrection (as opposed to revolution) is an *atemporal* event or series of events which must happen in the immediacy of the present moment. They claim that we can no longer even see how an insurrection might begin. Sixty years of pacification and containment of historical upheavals, sixty years of democratic anesthesia and the management of events, have dulled our perception of the real, our

sense of the war in progress. We need to start by recovering this perception".²⁶

Implicit in this is the notion that the ability to locate temporal sites where insurrection may occur has just as much to do with an affect-based perception as it does with historical materiality. It becomes a matter for the pro-insurrectionary to see that insurrection, as an offensive position, can occur in a myriad of sites within the contemporary moment.

This perception is posited as an ability that individuals once possessed, but no longer have because of Empire's effective management of everyday life. Thus, the first step towards an insurrectionary moment is reclaiming the ability to witness the potentiality for such moments in the first place. This ability to perceive, to see reality for what it is, in all of its interconnected, constructed, and coercive totality, is a prerequisite to action; perception as *a priori* to insurrection. This irreverence towards the orthodox Marxist position on the material historicity and political conditions underlying the revolutionary moment characterizes The Invisible Committee's own brand of "anarcho-autonomism," which eschews this formal logic as antiquated

²⁶ *ibid*, 95

and irrelevant to the contemporary context of late-capitalist Empire. They argue that in these times of perpetual crisis and totalizing catastrophe, waiting for the right historical conditions to act indicates not only redundancy (as any moment in Empire is an appropriate moment to wage insurrection), but also recuperation in that it is precisely this waiting, this deferral of action, that reproduces the managerial logic and schema of late-capitalist Empire. The Invisible Committee writes that

it's useless *to wait*—for a breakthrough, for the revolution, the nuclear apocalypse, or a social movement. To go on waiting is madness. The catastrophe is not coming, it is here. We are already situated within the collapse of a civilization. It is *within* this reality that we must choose sides. To no longer wait is, in one way or another, to enter into the logic of insurrection.²⁷

Their insurrectionary program has an urgent immediacy—one which forgoes self-reflectivity in favor of unrestrained offensive action. Furthering their theoretical line, The Invisible Committee argues that the imperative of immediate action is not insular in any sense. Through such action, in-

27 *ibid*, 96

dividual subjects can find the repressed elements of an authentic collectivity.

The second of the final four chapters, “Find Each Other,” is both an appeal to find other individual subjects to enact insurrection with *and* a case for the creation of new forms of collective being arising through the insurrectionary moment itself. Several of the philosophical tracts in *Tiqqun* appropriate Giorgio Agamben’s notion of a “form of life,” a self which

has reached the perfection of its own power and its own communicability—a life over which sovereignty and right no longer have any hold.²⁸

It is precisely in this thinking (implicitly anti-postmodern: truth is posited as something that can be articulated through the very act of becoming) that The Invisible Committee argue that through insurrection individual subjects can rid themselves of subject-identities circumscribed by Empire in favor of a collective-becoming through the proliferation of affinities between these “forms of life.” Thus, insurrectionary actions are ultimately expressions of truth in a postmodern age that stridently disavows any such affirmation. Through these encounters between subjectivities

28 Agamben, Giorgio, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, 114-15

and the affinities which result from them, insurrectionary moments are ultimately new forms of truth. The Invisible Committee writes,

an encounter, a discovery, a vast wave of strikes, an earthquake: every event produces truth by changing our way of being in the world.²⁹

It is within this theoretical framing that the production of truth is inextricably linked to the *changing* of being—the creation of new collective ontologies.

Truth is that which is subsumed by capital; that which is repressed, reconstructed, and commodified according to the designs of the Spectacle. In Horkheimer and Adorno's terms, truth is what is obfuscated by the culture industry. They write that for those living within the late-capitalist context,

language based entirely on truth simply arouses impatience to get on with the business deal it is probably advancing. The words that are not means appear senseless; the others seem to be fiction, untrue.³⁰

Truth becomes masked by the form and struc-

29 op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 97

30 op cit, *The Culture Industry*, 1234

tures of late-capitalist functioning and ideology. The Invisible Committee would agree that because of the debasement of truth in our postmodern age, truth is not to be found anywhere. But there is a way out of this postmodernist fatalism and determinism: truth can be made as the experience of becoming. *The Coming Insurrection* claims

a truth isn't something we hold but something that carries us. It makes and un-makes me, constitutes and undoes me as an individual; it distances me from many and brings me closer to those who also experience it.³¹

Here, becoming-as-truth can only make sense within the paradox that it is at once innately individual *and* inherently communal.

The third of the final chapters, "Get Organized," is a strong critique of conventional political organizations and their maneuvering in favor of a much more nuanced notion of collectivity—that of the *commune*. The Invisible Committee begin their foray into the role of organization within the context of late-capitalism by first arguing that it is precisely through organization and social management that individuals have

31 op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 97

been made subjects under Empire, and therefore, any counter-political methodology of organizing for the insurrection will have to do away with the means by which late-capitalist subjects have heretofore been organized. The Invisible Committee writes:

We know that individuals are possessed of so little life that they have to *earn a living*, to sell their time in exchange for a modicum of social existence. Personal time for social existence: such is work, such is the market.³²

Here, they describe the logic of late-capitalist Empire as only affording social existence as a direct result of one's commodified labor—simply put, one's social existence is entirely codified by the work one does. It makes no sense to the authors of *The Coming Insurrection* that, in attempting to explore alternatives to Empire, a pro-insurrectionary individual should replicate the very forms of alienation she is resisting. Thus, political organizing that imitates market-centered activities (as political work does), is not insurrectionary in any way.

To move outside of this replicated relationship, the pro-insurrectionary individual

32 *ibid*, 103

must move from the logic of work, management, and organization into the logic of the commune. The Invisible Committee claim:

From the outset, the time of the commune eludes work, it doesn't function according to that scheme—it prefers others.³³

Taking the classical labor-syndicalist logic behind such actions as the “wildcat strike” (an unsanctioned, spontaneous workplace strike not authorized by any trade unions) and applying it much more generally to the level of *refusing all work* outright, The Invisible Committee makes the case for a collective position that is hostile to late-capitalist Empire by refusing from the outset to engage in its hegemonic logic. They argue that work frames political discourse in late-capitalism in the sense that groups, through sanctioned reformist conduits, must enter into social contracts with others (at the most formal level: organizations) and *produce* their demands. Through the formation of the commune, the pro-insurrectionary eschews this logic of *production* for the logic of *refusal*. Thus, the productive schema undergirding temporality in the late-capitalist context must be changed through The Invisible Committee's form of communization.

33 *ibid*, 103

Time recontextualized is posited:

The exigency of the commune is to free up the most time for the most people. And we're not just talking about the *number of hours* free of any wage-labor exploitation. Liberated time doesn't mean a vacation. Vacant time, dead time, the time of emptiness and the fear of emptiness—this is the time of work. There will be no more time to *fill*, but a liberation of energy that no 'time' contains; lines that take shape, that accentuate each other, that we can follow at our leisure, to their ends, until we see them cross with others.³⁴

Temporality in the logic of the commune becomes non-determined and expansive. It is a new relationship to temporality in which the individual acts outside of time versus being entirely contained within it. Thus, one's temporal being is not fixed within the time it inhabits, but is instead projected outwards in rhizomatic fashion. Individual/collective energy and agency can extend upon a myriad of temporal lines of flight rather than being confined to a repetitive linearity.

At this point the theoretical trajectory

34 *ibid*, 104

of *The Coming Insurrection* begins to unravel. When The Invisible Committee offers material prescriptions to support their grandiloquent theoretical claims, their examples of communization and insurrection seem wholly disconnected from their more audacious philosophical claims. Where they speak about blocking the flow of capital, they cite examples of building occupations and jamming roads and highways. Where they speak to communization and political affinity they cite examples from history when those in the “worker’s movement were able to find each other in the workshop, then in the factory”.³⁵ They claim that the contemporary moment is similar, but expanded, as “we [now] have the whole of social space in which to find each other.”³⁶

If one reads these positive affirmations cynically, it appears that The Invisible Committee encounters the problem of turning theoretical critique into prescriptive action. This divergence from the Frankfurt School’s non-prescriptive form of critical engagement with late-capitalism (most significantly in the work of Theodor Adorno) shows how The Invisible Committee’s imme-

35 *ibid*, 99

36 *ibid*, 99

diacy of action translates into generalized and simplistic material actions. The commune begins to look like little more than the recognition of affinity and the creation of camaraderie. Critiquing the totality of Empire is one of *The Coming Insurrection*'s central premises, and it evokes the earlier work of Horkheimer and Adorno on the culture industry. Yet, whereas Horkheimer and Adorno are incredibly skeptical to an "outside" of the pervasive culture industry, The Invisible Committee are adamant that "forms-of-life" will "find each other"³⁷ and learn how to exist entirely outside of this totality. This underscores the contradictory nature of their theoretical analysis and their prescriptions for material actions. If one believes, as Horkheimer and Adorno claim, that society is merely "the stereotyped appropriation of everything, even the inchoate, for the purposes of [...] reproduction,"³⁸ then it follows that there is no possible "outside" to late-capitalist relations.

The Invisible Committee's most vociferous detractors are actually groups and theorists that are also from the contemporary ultra-left anti-state communist milieu, yet are more directly situated in a political lineage stemming

37 *ibid*, 99

38 *op cit*, *The Culture Industry*, 1227

from Marx (and, to a lesser degree, from Foucault). Of these groups, the contemporary communization journal *Endnotes* has most damningly pointed to the discrepancy between The Invisible Committee's analysis and their problematic prescriptions and affirmations. *Endnotes* claims that *The Coming Insurrection*

indicates a completely contemplative standpoint, even as it gesticulates wildly towards action. Its object becomes absolutely external and transcendent while its subject is reduced to fragile, thinly-veiled self-affirmations, and the 'what we must do' that it presents becomes reduced to a trivial list of survival skills.³⁹

Thus, the more traditional strains of ultra-left anti-state communism, as exemplified by those writing in *Endnotes*, have more in common with Adorno, who insisted on keeping critique in a purely negative polemical position. *Endnotes* claims that their particular strain of

communist theory does not present an alternative answer to the question of 'what shall we do?', for the abolition of the capi-

39 Endnotes. "What are we to do?" *Communization and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles*. Ed. Benjamin Noys. 35

talist class relation is not something on which one can *decide*.⁴⁰

Here, one problem with the claims of The Invisible Committee is brought to light.

Insurrection, in its most abstract sense, is posited by The Invisible Committee as a means to create “new” collectivized ontologies external to late-capitalist domination. Yet, even the most forgiving reading of *The Coming Insurrection* will still necessitate an inquiry about the forms such a radical social rupture can take. The Invisible Committee wavers between describing material actions that are sorely inconsistent with their theoretical analysis of the *conditions* for insurrection, and ambiguous generalizations that allude to some sense of novel rupture. This internal contradiction is exemplified in statements like:

The goal of any insurrection is to become irreversible. It becomes irreversible when you’ve defeated both authority and the need for authority, property and the taste for appropriation, hegemony and the desire for hegemony [...] Destruction has never been enough to make things irreversible. What matters

is how it's done.⁴¹

Here, even the very act of destruction is tied to affirmative prescriptions—destruction must be done in a *particular* way. Thus, while *The Invisible Committee* articulates a descriptive position and theoretical understanding of contemporary late-capitalist relations similar to Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of the culture industry (in that its totalizing domination is all-pervasive), their use of the insurrectionary moment as a site of ontological alterity fails to reconcile itself with the totality of Empire. Seen through this negative perspective, *The Coming Insurrection* attempts to rhetorically arrive at a position outside of late-capitalism only to see its argumentative premise subsumed into the logic of late-capitalism. If, as both *The Invisible Committee* and Horkheimer and Adorno argue, there is nothing outside of the rhizomatic domination of late-capitalism, then it follows that all attempts to prescriptively convey the insurrectionary moment are merely elements within the totality of Empire, late-capitalism, and the culture industry.

41 op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 130-31

2

Atonal Insurrection: Negation in the Work of Arnold Schoenberg and The Invisible Committee

An insurrection is not like a plague or a forest fire—a linear process that spreads from place to place after an initial spark. It rather takes the shape of a music, whose focal points, though dispersed in time and space, succeed in imposing the rhythm of their own vibrations, always taking on more density. To the point that any return to normal is no longer desirable or even imaginable.

—*The Coming Insurrection*

The Coming Insurrection posits a conception of insurrection as the creation of new collective ontologies through acts of radical social rupture. Eschewing the orthodox Marxist line that revolution is something temporally removed from the present, towards which pro-revolutionaries must organize and work, *The Invisible Commit-*

tee's use of insurrection claims it as an antagonistic challenge to late-capitalism firmly grounded in its own immediacy. Communism is therefore made immediate, and it is willed into being by insurrectionary acts of social rupture. While much has been written on the debt that The Invisible Committee owes to French strains of ultra-left anti-state communism, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben, Situationism, and the Italian Autonomia movement of the 1970s, their implicit debt to the sociopolitical themes of music has been largely ignored. By claiming that insurrection spreads by resonance and that such proliferation "takes the shape of a music",⁴² The Invisible Committee encourages the interpretation of a "coming insurrection" as an inherently musical act. Using a historical reading of the shift from tonality to atonality in Western art music, as exemplified by Arnold Schoenberg, this interpretation of *The Coming Insurrection* aims at exploring its explicitly political premises through its implicit musical qualities.

The Invisible Committee's use of the term "insurrection" in *The Coming Insurrection* functions on two distinct levels. The first retains

42 *ibid*, 12

the conventional understanding of insurrection as material acts of militant resistance, uprising, and direct opposition against forces of domination. The second, which this paper will focus on, understands insurrection as a new mode of collective becoming which is predicated upon the absolute negation of the present social order and its affective relational ties. The Invisible Committee claim that through a collective refusal of social relations under late-capitalism ("Empire"), fundamentally new ways of relating to other individuals begin to manifest. Unlike more traditional Marxist thinking, *The Coming Insurrection* hesitates to offer any prefigurative claims on what is to be done to create the preconditions for revolution, and instead claims that it is quite literally through negating Empire's affective ties that communism will be enacted. This negation, while expressing modernist sensibilities, can also been seen in the shift in Western art music from tonal structuring to experimental atonality.

Seen as one of the most radical departures from musical convention by modernist thinking, atonality is a calculated rejection of the tonal center and the subsequent hierarchical pitch relationships based on a specific key, which dominated Western art music until the turn of

the 20th century. A broad term, “atonality” refers to various attempts to destabilize the primacy of the tonal center. Perhaps most associated with what is called the “Second Viennese School,” atonality’s historical arrival was signaled by a “crisis of tonality.” My argument rests on this historical moment, as the musicology on atonality itself is secondary to the rhetoric generated by and around this form of early twentieth century music. I argue that Schoenberg’s atonality attempted to create an entirely new ontology of music, an ontology informed by negation, one which refuses convention with the aim of existing outside or beyond the aesthetic context of fin-de-siècle European society. This new ontology of negation is mirrored in much of the rhetoric within *The Coming Insurrection*, and thus Schoenberg’s “crises of tonality” can be seen as analogous in many ways to The Invisible Committee’s “crises of Empire.”

In his account of Thomas Mann’s novel, *Doctor Faustus*, music historian Alex Ross claims that the main character Adrian Leverkühn (who is widely viewed as a doppelganger for Arnold Schoenberg) is an intellectual monster [...] His music absorbs all styles of the past and shatters them into fragments”

while attempting to “remake the world in utopian forms”.⁴³ This nascent nihilism is also evoked in *The Coming Insurrection*, as it claims that “there’s nothing more to be said, everything has to be destroyed”.⁴⁴ Both positions are based in the acknowledgement that older systemic forms have failed as justification for existence itself, both musically and socio-politically, and they need to be completely destroyed in the hopes of creating new forms of being. For Schoenberg this failure is embodied by tonality, for The Invisible Committee it is by late-capitalist Empire. All attempts at the reformation of both these failed and antiquated systems are merely assimilated back into mainstream musical and sociopolitical discourse, respectively. Thus, discursive practices must be negated in order to move beyond hegemonic assimilation.

For the post-Marxist theorist Theodor Adorno, who wrote extensively on Schoenberg, only the most recent phase of music—in which the isolated subject communicates as if from across an abyss of silence precisely through the complete alienation of

43 *ibid*, 86

44 Ross, Alex. *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*.

its language—justifies a coldness that, as a self-contained mechanical functioning, is good only for producing disaster”.⁴⁵

Disaster is central to both Schoenberg and The Invisible Committee as it forms the basis for their immediate threats of radical change—a clear position of antagonism to the established order. For Schoenberg it was important that his forays into atonality carried “the threat that *all* music will sound like this”.⁴⁶ For The Invisible Committee, it is the antagonistically totalizing claim that, “we don’t want to occupy the territory, we want to *be* the territory”.⁴⁷ Thus, for both parties the enmity to their contemporary hegemonic moment (be it musical or political) is predicated upon direct contestation with forces of opposition. It is not enough that a space exists for atonality or communism within their respective aesthetic and social structures; rather, atonality and communism necessarily present their coming-into-being as forces of complete subsumption—negating anything which stands in opposition to them.

Both The Invisible Committee and Schoenberg attempt to create forces that operate

45 op cit, *Philosophy of New Music*, 92

46 op cit, *The Rest is Noise*, 39

47 op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 108

in relation to teleology. *The Coming Insurrection* claims that

the West is a civilization that has survived all the prophecies of its collapse with a singular stratagem. [...] The operation can be summarized like this: an entity in its death throes sacrifices itself as a content in order to survive as a form.⁴⁸

Thus, for The Invisible Committee, late-capitalist Empire is the teleological end (pure form) of a capitalist ideology, which at one point in its historical development possessed some content. Late-capitalist Empire contains within itself the elements which necessitate its own collapse. Thus, as proponents of this particular conception of insurrectionary communism, The Invisible Committee advocates that “forms-of-life” (a term borrowed from Giorgio Agamben to indicate individuals who are no longer biopolitical subjects) enact communism within the immediacy of the present moment. This form of communization precipitates both the collapse of Empire and the creation of new collective ontologies outside of late-capitalist schema.

For Schoenberg, teleology functioned to validate the atonal turn as the logical overcom-

48 *ibid*, 91

ing of an existential crisis within Western art music. Schoenberg

set forth an elaborate teleology of musical history, a theory of irreversible progress, to justify his actions.⁴⁹

Teleology, for both Schoenberg and *The Invisible Committee*, is not as finite or fixed as one would believe. Instead, Schoenberg and *The Invisible Committee* view the fixity within a teleological rendering of music and political history as something that can be worked *through and beyond*. Alex Ross maintains that Schoenberg was noted for cryptic pronouncements like: “I can see through walls”.⁵⁰ As odd as this claim seems, it implies that Schoenberg was able to envisage ontologies of alterity beyond the confines of the historical present. It is a vision at once acknowledging the totality in which the individual subject is located and the possibility that other modes of being exist outside of it. For Schoenberg, tonality was a musical space of confinement and stagnation. Thus, the teleology of Western art music necessarily has a political dimension.

Tonal music is set upon a binarized/du-

49 op cit, *The Rest is Noise*, 38

50 ibid, 38

alistic tension, because the return to the tonal center necessitates the subsumption of one element of the duality to the other. This dichotomy in tonal music functions on multiple levels, one of which is the resolution back into consonance after playing with its dissonant other. Here the return is paramount, as return signifies the safe and familiar. The return, or perhaps more polemically phrased the retreat, into the familiar is a grounding in a center with a clearly articulated, delineated, and circumscribed identity or essence—in Foucauldian terms: the subjectivized. The tonic key is an identity that makes sense of everything else in its field of being. Mediants, subdominants, dominants, and supertonics only make sense in relation to their tonic key. Thus, tonality is an inherently hierarchical system of prioritization. Because this tonal center at once *defines* and *is defined by* those elements of scale and harmony that use the tonal center as their organizing referent, it is the embodiment of a strict musical identity.

In terms of a musicological teleology, the “crisis of tonality” arises through the proliferation and exhaustion of all the tonal “identities” possible within the tonal system. Much as The Invisible Committee claims that Empire con-

tains within itself the contradictions that will inevitably bring about its own destruction, Schoenberg claims that the

end of the system is brought about with such inescapable cruelty by its own functions [...] Every living thing has within it that which changes, develops, and destroys it. Life and death are both equally present in the embryo.⁵¹

Schoenberg argues that tonality contains within itself the conditions that will cause its own collapse. Thus, just as tonality's "catastrophe was inevitable",⁵² so too was the birth of atonality inevitable, as its role as a force of negation was already prefigured by the historical progress of tonal music. Seen in this perspective, communism as envisaged by The Invisible Committee is not what arises after the collapse of late-capitalist Empire, but what can be enacted in the temporal present as a catalyst for Empire's destruction. Against more orthodox Marxist claims, communism for The Invisible Committee is found in the very act of becoming, and is not subsequent to any "revolutionary" or "transitional" moment. This position validates their proposition that it is

⁵¹ op cit, *The Rest is Noise*, 65

⁵² ibid, 65

not Lenin's question of "What is to be done?" but rather, "How is it to be done?" (the name of an essay from the second *Tiqqun* journal). The Invisible Committee claims:

So we have a corpse on our backs, but we won't be able to shake it off just like that. Nothing is to be expected from the end of civilization, from its clinical death. [...] To decide for the death of civilization, then to work out how it will happen: only decision will rid us of the corpse.⁵³

So, conceptualizing communism as a process of becoming is inherently an ontological project.

At the basis of Schoenberg's revolutionizing approach to the destruction of the tonal center is a move towards an altogether *different* ontology. Ross argues that the young Schoenberg's fin-de-siècle Europe was a historical context in which

occult and mystical societies [...] promised rupture from the world of the present. In the political sphere, Communists, anarchists, and ultra-nationalists plotted from various angles to overthrow the quasi-liberal monarchies of Europe.⁵⁴

53 op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 94

Thus, Schoenberg's own attempts at musical subversion were not isolated from larger socio-political currents at the time, for

the world was unstable and it seemed that one colossal Idea, or, failing that, one well-placed bomb, could bring it tumbling down. There was an almost titillating sense of imminent catastrophe.⁵⁵

Schoenberg's earlier attempts at a "free atonality" tried to musically enact the effect of a "well-placed bomb," while his later, more restrained attempts using twelve tone technique attempted to create the "one colossal Idea" that could bring it all down. While one approach proved be much more systematic than the other, both free atonality and twelve tone technique embodied the late-modernist sentiment that "in the face of the gigantic lie of the cult of beauty—so the rhetoric went—art had to become negative, critical".⁵⁶ This critical negativity informs the basis of Schoenberg's new ontology of music. Dissolving conventional tonal tropes within Western art music, Schoenberg's atonality creates entirely new musical languages, new aesthetics, and in atonality's culmination in twelve tone technique,

54 op cit, Ross, 40

55 ibid, 40

56 ibid, 40

new systems of being. These new musical ontologies are essentially new aesthetic truths that emerge from the negation of the totality of tonality. This is paradoxical because, as critic Alexander L. Ringer argues:

[...] Schoenberg's dauntless quest for truth simply does not square with his oft-expressed, unshakable, and infallibly proven faith in the essential immutability of all fundamental precepts.⁵⁷

If we view the rise of atonality as historically determined, the search for truth becomes complicated. Through this very contradiction, this atonal act of negation, new musical modalities emerge.

The Invisible Committee claims that the ontology of the present is actually a mere Spectacle, entirely codified by hegemonic apparatuses. The ontology of the present cannot be reformed because it is the ontology of Empire: domination, subservience, and exploitation. They claim that the West is at once the most egregious perpetrator of this imperial hegemony and also completely enraptured by it; and that "we belong to a generation that lives *very well* in

57 op cit, Ringer, 23

this fiction”.⁵⁸ Thus, like Schoenberg before them, The Invisible Committee views negation as the only logical step to take against this totalizing fiction. The Invisible Committee claims that through the act of insurrection new “authentic” forms of collective relations can be created. They claim that through insurrection,

we are forced to reestablish contact, albeit a potentially fatal one, with what’s there, to rediscover the rhythms of reality.⁵⁹

Here insurrectionary ontology is conflated with reality, as a collectivized truth that emerges through a shared refusal. This argument is inherently anti-postmodern; a notion of authentic truth reemerges as a tangible outcome of collectivized insurrection. By finding other forms-of-life, and enacting insurrection together as the manifestation of *communism-in-the-present*, a non-Spectacularized reality once again becomes possible.

Unlike Schoenberg’s work in twelve tone technique, The Invisible Committee does not want to postulate their unique conception of insurrection as merely another system, even as one of negation and subversion, to be adopt-

⁵⁸ op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 44

⁵⁹ ibid, 82

ed and subsequently recuperated by Empire. In his later years, Schoenberg found it necessary to create a system to ensure that music did not regress back to tonal conventions. Twelve tone technique was a system that forced Schoenberg and those who adopted its methods never to return to tonality at all. With this shift from free atonality to the systematized serialism of twelve tone technique, Schoenberg came to terms with the limits of a negative freedom. The negation itself became systematized and totalized. Adorno claims that through Schoenberg's new negative system,

variation, the instrument of compositional dynamism, becomes total and is as a result annulled. The music no longer presents itself as being in a process of development. [...] Variation as such no longer appears at all. Everything and nothing is variation.⁶⁰

This is a concession to systemicity that The Invisible Committee refuses to make. They claim that “the goal of any insurrection is to become irreversible”,⁶¹ and by extension, *non-recuperable*. They go on to state that insurrection

60 Adorno, Theodor W. *Philosophy of New Music*. Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. 50

61 *ibid*, 130

[...] becomes irreversible when you've defeated both authority and the need for authority, property and the taste for appropriation, hegemony and the desire for hegemony.⁶²

Mere destruction is not enough, for a whole new way of relating must necessarily arise out of insurrection. This is what is meant by a wholly negative ontology, a mode of being with none of the coercive forms of domination proliferated by late-capitalist Empire—even at the abstract level of the *mere desire* to dominate. Thus, The Invisible Committee's insurrectionary project not only seeks the negation of private property (in the material sense), but the negation of the very *desire* to own property (in the psychological sense). They argue that

destruction has never been enough to make things irreversible. What matters is how it's done. There are ways of destroying that unfailingly provoke the return of what has been crushed.⁶³

It is therefore a matter of the process itself: insurrection must always be an act that incorporates a tacit and critical cognizance of itself *pre-*

62 op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 130-31

63 ibid, 131

cisely as a process. In this sense, insurrection is inherently an act of ontological becoming, simultaneously aware of itself as a material process and as a metaphysical site where new, authentic forms of collective-relations emerge.

Atonality and insurrection are both attempts to completely break with prevailing systems of dominance and hegemony. At the core of these two disparate yet connected forms of praxis is an inherently negative project. Imbued with antagonistic criticality, both Schoenberg and *The Invisible Committee* claim that freedom must necessarily be born out of complete refusal. Yet on closer examination, their differences become apparent. Both projects are accompanied with a regressive temptation to depend on older forms—relics from the very systems from which they attempt to remove themselves. For Schoenberg, this required the negative system of twelve tone technique because familiar tropes still managed to find their way into his earlier free atonal compositions. Adorno claims that the twelve tone system

subjugates music by setting it free. The subject rules over the music by means of a rational system in order to succumb to this

rational system itself.⁶⁴

Thus, paradoxically, Schoenberg depended on a system to facilitate a complete negation of the tonal system—a system negating a system.

In contrast, The Invisible Committee is pointedly vigilant about how resistance to Empire can either be recuperated into late-capitalist logic or reproduce the very systems of domination that they intend to destroy. Truths are born from the immediacy of the insurrectionary social rupture, and thus it is the act of negation itself that creates the heretofore unimaginable new spaces of being. Forms-of-life, collectivity, communization—all only make sense in the context of the social rupture itself. The Invisible Committee elaborates upon this conflation between action and actors by claiming

In truth, there is no gap between what we are, what we do, and what we are becoming. [...] Here lies the truly revolutionary potentiality of the present.⁶⁵

This is how they can evade the recuperation back into a systematized conception of their own negative project. Thus, while The Invisible Committee's coming insurrection and Schoenberg's ato-

64 op cit, *Philosophy of New Music*, 54

65 op cit, *The Coming Insurrection*, 15

nality are both characterized by ontological rupture aimed at the subversion of the hegemony within their own sociopolitical and musicological contexts, they diverge greatly in the methodology, results, and effects of their negations.

3

Deserting Empire, Deserting Humanism: Anti-Humanist Critiques of the Individual, Absolute Knowledge, Rationality, and History in Tiqqun's *Introduction to Civil War*

In Tiqqun's *Introduction to Civil War*, the confluence of late-capitalism, new power dynamics, and the crisis/disintegration of the modern state form emerge as a totalizing socio-historical episteme of domination. Tiqqun labels this new form of governance "Empire," by which they understand the complete politicization of all aspects of the social and paradoxically the complete socialization of all aspects of the political. Thus, Empire forms the conceptual basis for understanding an episteme in which there is no longer any distinction between the political and the social, the private and the public, capitalist exchange relations and non-capitalist relations. It flattens reality to a

mere discursive network of domination through the hyper-proliferation of apparatuses of control. Tacitly, Tiqqun's analysis of life within Empire implicitly draws from what I argue is an inherently anti-humanist tradition. By relying explicitly on Foucault's work on biopower and the development of disciplinary practices, on Nietzsche's criticism of rationality and reason, and on Walter Benjamin's attack against a progressive historicism, Tiqqun is deeply antagonistic to Enlightenment thinking. Within Tiqqun's analysis and critique (of such humanistic tropes as the formation of the individual, idealism, rationality/reason, and a progressive view of history) is a deeply anti-humanist temperament that unequivocally informs their politics of resistance to Empire.

Tiqqun supports its critique of the humanist notion of the "individual" by analyzing how Empire, through the use of biopower and the Spectacle (in the Debordian sense of the term) produces subjectivities—or, in Foucauldian terms: the process of subjectification (subjectivation). This runs counter to the Enlightenment-era humanist tradition, which starts with the individual as the measure of experience—the fundamental unit, whose ultimate aim is individual freedom and the fullest

expression of individual desire. Tiqqun's thinking on the formation of the individual and the production of its subjectivities stems directly from the anti-humanist tradition. Tiqqun claims that this process of subjectification finds its point of highest development through biopower, precisely because the biopolitical processes of producing subjectivities function by "containing each being within its Self, that is, *within his body, in extracting bare life from each form-of-life*".⁶⁶ At this point, even essential individual existence—one of the most sacred aspects of humanism—is immediately problematized through discursive relationships that effectively dominate it.

The distinction between biopower and earlier forms of power, like the sovereign in the absolutist state, is that biopower is a form of control which from the outset of its production, its own immanence, precludes any individual agency, as it can only be produced by already dominated subjects. It is the total implication of what once was called the individual subject within a discursive network (machine) of control. It affirms life, keeps the body living, and in doing so finds a more effective means to control

66 The Invisible Committee, *Introduction to Civil War*, 86

subjects. When a biopolitical subject “chooses” to implicate itself within the apparatuses that effectively control it, domination becomes more streamlined and easier to sustain. Foucault elaborates upon this point as he claims that the role of this form of political biopower

is perpetually to re-inscribe this relation through a form of unspoken warfare; to re-inscribe it in social institutions, in economic inequalities, in language, in the bodies themselves of each and every one of us.⁶⁷

Tiqqun argues that the development of the modern state into Empire is accompanied by a process of subjectification in which

the individual produced by this process of economic embodiment carries within him a crack. And it is out of this crack that his bare life seeps. His acts themselves are full of cracks, broken from the inside. [...] Here, instead of forms-of-life, we find an overproduction branching out in all directions, a nearly comical tree-like proliferation of subjectivities.⁶⁸

Tiqqun posits forms-of-life as a way out of the

67 Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*. 90

68 op cit, *Introduction to Civil War*, 87

subjective notion of the “individual” coming from the humanist tradition.

Forms-of-life necessarily take on an ethical dimension as a way out of the ontology of the individual. Tiqqun claims that contrary to humanist thinking, “the elementary human unity is not the body—the individual—but the form-of-life.”⁶⁹ Thus, for Tiqqun’s inherently anti-humanist approach, the argument depends on *positionality* (ethical inclinations). Tiqqun appropriates Giorgio Agamben’s theorization of Wittgenstein’s initial use of this concept: a form-of-life is that which affects a body as an ethical “clinamen, a leaning, an attraction, a taste”.⁷⁰ These “leanings” form the basis of forces, or ethical intensities projected as the line on which “power grows.”⁷¹ Expounding upon this point, the assuming of a form-of-life (as opposed to predicative identities) allows a body to follow its own outgrowth of power—the proliferation of its own force—and the conglomeration of multiple forms-of-life pursuing their own lines of flight become the “free play” Tiqqun calls “civil war.”

For Tiqqun, Empire’s fundamental im-

69 *ibid*, 16

70 *ibid*, 18

71 *ibid*, 20

petus is the pacification of “civil war”: the quelling of ethical intensities. The only response that resists this pacification is a further intensification of ethical inclinations, not a proliferation of predicates through subjectification. This, then, is a fundamental critique of the way the individual is formed, as it implies that the individual is nothing but a set of interconnected predicates, identities, and subjectivities that are entirely mediated by Empire and its apparatuses of control. This is fully in line with conventional critiques of humanism, which argue that the individual, as a fully independent and autonomous construction, simply does not exist and is instead completely mediated by the socio-linguistic/discursive fields of the context the pre-subjectivated body finds itself in. Tiqqun claims that Empire has complicated and obfuscated forms-of-life, and in their place fostered and affirmed (through apparatuses like biopower) “identities” instead. They argue

paradoxically, in this civilization that we can no longer claim as our own without consenting to self-liquidation, conjuring away forms-of-life most often appears as a *desire for form*.⁷²

72 *ibid*, 21

Here the affirmation of that which is one's "own" is actually posited as "self-liquidation"—thus, the further one inscribes one's self in a predicative identity the further one is removed from one's fundamental form-of-life.

The construction of mediating forms between a form-of-life and its individual identity is almost entirely done at the subconscious level as almost all identity-development is affirmative—even when it is opposed to dominant ideologies (like the identity of "anti-capitalist"). Because identity formation is almost always affirmative (ie the individual willingly forms the varied components of their own so-called unique identity) it constitutes one pole of imperial domination through its ability to further distance a body from its own ethical inclinations and instead construct a human being as something grounded in its own materiality. This materiality is what Tiqqun calls the "desire for form," or the impetus of individuals to create themselves precisely as individuals, singular in their autonomy and subject only to their own desires. What complicates this superficial position—the belief in the autonomous construction of the individual—is the counter-claim that individual desire is entirely mediated by a whole set

of productive forces.

Tiqqun states that the other pole of imperial domination, which works in seamless tandem with biopower, is the Spectacle. This term, appropriated from the French Situationist Guy Debord, suggests that *all* social relations are mediated by images and representations. Thus, if individual desire is a purely reactive and interpretative response to social relations that are inherently mediated by representations, then individual desire does not exist independent of the social field in which it is situated. Tiqqun extrapolates upon this subjectivated biopolitical subject's "desire for form" as "the search for an archetypal resemblance, an Idea of self placed before or in front of oneself."⁷³ Here again, the humanistic impulse is critiqued because the search for something essential about the human individual informs an inherently hermeneutical approach to the false-ontology of Empire. The desire to uncover "an archetypal resemblance" of the self begins (without any critical reflexivity whatsoever) in the hermeneutics of recovery the idea that there is an essential quality about the individual which can indeed be re/un-covered.

Identity formation often assumes essen-

73 *ibid*, 21

tialist rhetoric, as its own logic positions it as a project of recovery—of getting to the ontological foundation of the singular individual, what or who it “really” is. Tiqqun, like the anti-humanist theorists before them, argue that to oppose this way of thinking, a project ethically aligned purely and only against the totality of Empire must necessarily entail the assumption of forms-of-life, not further implication within the discourses of imperial domination. They argue that

actually, to assume a form-of-life is a letting-go, an abandonment. It is at once fall and elevation, a movement and a staying-within-oneself.⁷⁴

Here the distinction between ethics and metaphysics becomes more apparent. Abandonment, in this theoretical context, is the “letting-go” of such basic metaphysical questions as “what am I?” or “what is the fundamental nature of my being?”

Instead, what is put forth is an *ethics of becoming* that recontextualizes all questions of being as questions only concerned with “*how* one is being.” This “abandonment” is the negative basis of a form-of-life—the “fall.” Conversely, the

74 *ibid*, 21

“elevation” within the assumption of a form-of-life—its positive component is an affirmation of new ethical ways of being in concert with other bodies assuming the same form-of-life. This coming-together of commensurate forms-of-life, ethically aligned in their opposition to all other forms-of-life against them, is communism made immediate. Before departing from Empire’s production and circulation of identities through the apparatuses of biopower and subjectification, we should further explore the forms that stand as a third-party mediator between a body and its corresponding form-of-life—this notion of “an Idea of self placed before or in front of oneself.”⁷⁵

Against the humanist notion of idealism, Tiqqun argues that whenever something presents itself as an Idea (Platonic) which ostensibly takes the place of the form-of-life, Empire has succeeded in pacification through the act of distancing a body from its form-of-life. This is reminiscent of Plato’s metaphysics, whose conception of ontological reality is rooted in *deferral*: the privileging of reality as subject to a world of ideal forms, rather than reality solely as reality-itself. In Plato’s Socratic dialogue, *Phaedrus*, the “region beyond heaven,” that of ideal forms, is

75 *ibid*, 21

portrayed as follows:

The region beyond heaven has never yet been adequately described in any of our earthly poet's compositions, nor will it ever be. But since one has to make a courageous attempt to speak the truth, especially when it is truth one is speaking about, here is a description. This region is filled with true being. True being has no colour or form; it is intangible, and visible only to intelligence, the soul's guide. True being is the province of everything that counts as true knowledge. [...] In the course of its circuit it observes justice as it really is, self-control, knowledge—not the kind of knowledge that is involved with change and differs according to which of the various existing things (to use the term 'existence' in its everyday sense) it makes its object, but the kind of knowledge whose object is things as they really are.⁷⁶

Plato, through Socrates, defines *true being* as that which is objective and unequivocally existent in the realm of the ideal forms. It is a form of metaphysical posturing that dismisses

76 Plato. *Phaedrus*. 2002, 30

the inherent mysticism of abstract interpretative systems (mathematics for example) and instead privileges a conception of reality explicitly based on externalized absolutes.

Tiqqun charts a theoretical move in completely the opposite direction to Platonic hypostasis. They hold to the anti-humanist dismissal of absolutist thinking—nothing objective exists for the hermeneutic theorist to recover as essential to existence. Starting from this presupposition, Tiqqun instead argues that a form-of-life is an ethical position, not an ontological one. As such, they evade all attempts to become essentialized, because forms-of-life are not concrete materialities in-and-of-themselves, but rather are leanings or inclinations. They write:

‘My’ form-of-life does not relate to what I am, but to how, to the specific way, I am what I am. In other words, between a being and its qualities, there is the abyss of its own presence and the singular experience I have of it, at a certain place and time.⁷⁷

Tiqqun situates a form-of-life within the “abyss of its own presence and the singular experience” one has of it, so that a form-of-life becomes immanent in a multitude of infinite moments of

⁷⁷ op cit, *Introduction to Civil War*, 23

the present. By situating the manifestation of a form-of-life in the immediacy of a “certain place and time” the form-of-life evades all attempts to make it qualitatively objective or reminiscent of some sort of human essence. In this way Tiqqun’s philosophical grounding is in the lineage of Heraclitus, not of Parmenides. Through the engagement of the free-play of forms-of-life, Tiqqun’s philosophy is one of the potentiality of ruptures, breaks, fissures, and (when made communal) insurrections.

Another of Tiqqun’s anti-humanist arguments is their presentation of Empire as a totalizing affective network of the apparatuses and power relations of domination. By charting the modern state’s development to its final form as Empire, Tiqqun implicitly underscores how this development was nothing more than the continuous progress of Enlightenment-era rationality and reason. Seen from this perspective, Empire is the logical result of the progress of humanistic reason. This is evident in Tiqqun’s critiques of Kantian conceptions of universal reason, a part of their multi-pronged attack against the socio-political development of Empire. Speaking towards the erasure of *hostis* (enemy forms-of-life aligned against one’s own particu-

lar form-of-life), Tiqqun claims that the third article of Kant's *Towards a Perpetual Peace*, which proposes the conditions for a final dissolution of particular communities and their subsequent formal reintegration into a Universal State, is nevertheless unequivocal in insisting that 'Cosmopolitan right shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality'.⁷⁸

Kantian idealism finds its contemporary manifestation in the social shift that occurs with Empire. Instead of dissolving "particular communities" in order to reintegrate their bodies into the formal logic/schema of control that formed the basis of the modern state (particularly in its absolutist and liberal forms), Empire affirms and allows these "particular communities" to exist as long as it maintains control over the predicates and identities available to these communities. Thus, instead of subsuming plurality to a homogenized conception of the Universal State, Empire allows and affirms plurality in order to construct the fiction that these new imperial/biopolitical subjects are still exercising "individual autonomy"—another left-over from Enlightenment-era humanism.

78 *ibid*, 50

For Tiqqun, Empire is the rational development of the modern state into an era where the state acknowledges its own obsolescence. They claim that the modern state, through its various incarnations as the absolutist/sovereign state, the liberal state, and the welfare state, has always been on a rational progression towards its own impossibility. This impossibility is informed by the fact, as Tiqqun claims, that the modern state attempted to politicize all aspects of the social and in so doing ended up socializing all aspects of the political. Thus for Tiqqun, Empire is the totalizing amalgamation of the social and the political—and in such a climate the state form becomes obsolete because there is no longer any need to keep up the pretense that the state exists in order to make clear the distinction between the social and the political. Every social position or space, even those once relegated to the “private” realm (matters of the home, etc), has now been politicized and colonized by Empire. This totalization, the collapse of the social into the political and the political into the social, stems from a humanist logic initially arguing for universal human essence. Under the pretense of securing humanist fundamentals like “liberty,” “justice,” and “autonomy,” the state justified its

own control and domination independent of the universal essence it purported to serve.

Tiqqun's critique of this logic resonates with Nietzschean thought. In the first essay of section thirteen of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche attacks the humanist concept of "the good," which later informs the pursuit of a universal conception of "liberty," "justice," and "autonomy." He argues that, qualitatively, there is no such universal conception of the "good" and, conversely, all that exists are relations of force (which Foucault will later recast as "power"). These amoral relations of force are present in Tiqqun's work, in the actualization of forms-of-life. They claim that

*Thought [is] that which converts a form-of-life into a force, into a sensible effectivity. In every situation there is one line that stands out among all the others, the line along which power grows. Thought is the capacity for singling out and following this line. A form-of-life can be embraced only by following this line, meaning that all thought is strategic.*⁷⁹

Tiqqun identifies Empire's ability to placate and pacify all of these "lines" of power and

79 *ibid*, 20

force, as the cessation of “civil war” (aka the free-play of forms-of-life). This critique of the pacification of *force* is entirely Nietzschean, as Nietzsche claims that

to demand of strength that it should not express itself as strength, that it should not be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength.⁸⁰

Tiqqun would argue that the Nietzschean expression of strength as outlined above is almost synonymous with their assumption of a form-of-life—as only the actualization of a particular ethic can effectively produce power aligned against efforts to pacify or sublimate it. Furthermore, Nietzsche’s critique of the “subject” parallels Tiqqun’s own critique of the political or economical subject. In Nietzsche’s words

A quantum of force is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect—more, it is nothing other than precisely this very driving, willing, effecting, and only owing

80 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. 1989. 45.

to the seduction of language (and of the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it) which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a “subject,” can it appear otherwise.⁸¹

Here, the humanist construction of the individual “subject” faces a most hostile critique. Nietzsche argues that the fallacy that all force stems from an actor emerges from the rationality of language, and from the laws and delineations presupposed by its use. He argues instead that

there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything.⁸²

This forms the basis of Tiqqun’s theorizing that a form-of-life is an ethical posturing (the becoming of the “deed”), not rooted in individual identity or subjecthood.

While there is a great degree of confluence in Nietzsche and Tiqqun’s critique of the subject and in their case for an ethic of force/power, there are also points of divergence. The most apparent is that the slave morality which Nietzsche so vehemently criticizes comes almost

81 *ibid.*, 45

82 *ibid.*, 45

entirely from his doubt that language can refer to reality in any fundamental way; yet Tiqqun's treatment of the way that bodies are subjectivated and made to implicate themselves in predicative identities looks to Empire, rather than to language, as the root of this domination. While in hindsight this difference comes from the obvious difference in Nietzsche and Tiqqun's socio-historical contexts, it is still a very informative divergence of thought. Nietzsche claims that:

This type of man [the one who succumbs to slave morality] *needs* to believe in a neutral independent 'subject,' prompted by an instinct for self-preservation and self-affirmation in which every lie is sanctified. The subject (or, to use a more popular expression, the *soul*) has perhaps been believed in hitherto more firmly than anything else on earth because it makes possible to the majority of mortals, the weak and oppressed of every kind, the sublime self-deception that interprets weakness as freedom, and their being thus-and-thus as a *merit*.⁸³

While at face value this analysis of the inherent cowardice of subjecthood seems to align

83 *ibid*, 46

with Tiqqun's own qualms with the process of subjectification—Nietzsche still believes in a fundamental essence (divorced from the “subject”) with the agency to fully exert its own will.

Tiqqun argues that the subject's “instinct for self-preservation and self-affirmation” is merely the result of affective apparatuses of domination exerting control onto individual bodies. “Self-preservation” and “self-affirmation,” for Tiqqun, form the basis of biopower, and in contrast to Nietzsche's view, are apparatuses that the individual body has little power to reject or acquiesce to. The subtle difference that emerges here is a matter of causality, as Nietzsche would argue that slave morality can simply be overcome by a strong-willed individual (his *ubermensch*), whereas for Tiqqun, operating within the totality of Empire, only the coming together of ethical intensities as forms-of-life can overcome the apparatuses of subjectification. Thus, at its root, this is a difference between an individual notion of actualizing force (Nietzsche) and a communal notion of actualizing power (Tiqqun). However, clearly neither relies on the notion of the subject.

In the preface to “An Ethic of Civil War,” in *Introduction to Civil War*, Tiqqun quotes Ni-

etzsche's "Posthumous Fragments":

New form of community, asserting itself in a warlike manner. Otherwise the spirit grows soft. No 'gardens' and no sheer 'evasion in the face of the masses.' War (but without gunpowder!) between different thoughts! and their armies!⁸⁴

Here, Tiqqun finds the ethic of civil war in Nietzsche's thought. Whereas Nietzsche focuses on the war between "different thoughts," a Tiqqunist rendering would include the war between different ethical intensities and forms-of-life. It is a laying bare, a peeling away of the simulacra to expose the inherent hostilities underlying life within Empire. Here, civil war becomes the war amongst hostile forms-of-life. At all times, the potential for such war exists, sometimes dormant, waiting to rupture through the Spectacle in the forms of insurrection and communization (communism made immediate). Thus, the task of any militant is to further the visibility of these hostilities while concurrently finding forms-of-life with the same ethical predispositions and coming into direct contact with the potential such coming-together affords. Tiqqun claims that

insofar as we stay in contact with our own

84 op cit, *Introduction to Civil War*, 173

potentiality, even if only in thinking through our experience, we represent danger within the metropolises of Empire. We are *whatever enemy* against which all the imperial apparatuses and norms are positioned.⁸⁵

It is precisely in this potentiality to become *whatever enemy* against Empire that Tiqqun's theoretical trajectory is inherently *ahistorical*.

In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin constructs the distinction between historiography and the ways that historical knowledge is produced and acquired. In other words Benjamin creates a decisive split between the notion of history as one of ever-unfolding progress (Enlightenment-era historicism) and a philosophy of history based on its own interruption and "arrest" from the flow of progress.⁸⁶ This forms an ardent critique of the linearity of Enlightenment-era views on history and time. Benjamin argues that humanist historicism is informed by the "empathy" that historicists have for political "victors."⁸⁷ He claims

85 *ibid*, 175

86 Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations: Walter Benjamin Essays and Reflections*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. 262

87 *ibid*, 256

that the ascription of linearity to historical developments is merely the acknowledgment that all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. [...] Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate.⁸⁸

One must be positioned against this conception of history if one aims to see a future of radical potentiality.

The future cannot be a site of radical potentiality if it is viewed as merely the rational continuity of the present; thus Benjamin argues that the present needs to be arrested or interrupted to fully understand it and recontextualize the future. The humanist historicist has succumbed to a historicizing impulse that is oblivious to the realization that “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”⁸⁹ Here Benjamin is most explicit in his critique of Enlightenment/humanist historicism as essentially a view of progress that rationalizes domination, barbarism, and ultimately fascism. He

88 *ibid*, 356

89 *ibid*, 256

makes this connection apparent when he claims that “one reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm.”⁹⁰ This conception of history as progress can only lead to fascism, yet its experience—the actual understanding of its temporality—is only differentiated as a mere matter of perception.

Benjamin analyzes Paul Klee’s painting “Angelus Novus” to speak to this difference of perception. He claims that

this is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe that keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.⁹¹

This conception of history, progress in the name of the Enlightenment as propelled toward imminent catastrophe, is a trope within Tiqqun’s own critique of history.

Tiqqun follows in the wake of Benjamin’s theoretical work on history as they too argue that conceiving of history as a “chain of events”—a progression with a legitimacy stem-

90 *ibid*, 257

91 *ibid*, 257

ming from “reason”—can only lead to the complete decimation of life-itself. In an analysis that seems entirely informed by Benjamin, Tiqqun argues that

at first glance, Empire seems to be a parodic recollection of the entire, frozen history of a ‘civilization.’ And this impression has a certain intuitive correctness. Empire is in fact civilization’s last stop before it reaches the end of its line, the final agony in which it sees life pass before its eyes.⁹²

Empire forms the stage, based on a particular faith in Enlightened reason, of statist development as it ends the sequence beginning with the absolutist state and progressing through the liberal and welfare states. For Tiqqun, Empire is the stage of development that witnesses the inherent impossibility of the modern state’s aims. It is the stage governing the crises that emerge when the modern state realizes that in order to actualize its goals (the complete politicization of all social fields/realms), it must necessarily see its own coming-apart. The modern state can only exist in its difference (the acknowledgment that the state is made up of those segments of life which are *politicized*), yet once everything

92 op cit, *Introduction to Civil War*, 128

becomes politicized the delineations securing the state precisely as *the state* cease to exist and so the modern state merges completely with a social-realm entirely subject to domination (ie Empire). In this totality of developmental progress, Tiqqun introduces the necessity for moments that break from this linearity.

If anything in Tiqqun's work can be called prescriptive it is their outline of action after their much stronger analyses of the conditions of Empire. Ruptures, breaks, and insurrection are the way out of the dominating apparatuses of Empire. They claim that these (ethical) positions against Empire are "the gesture of breaking the predictable chains of events, of liberating compressed possibilities."⁹³ This rhetoric of interruption carries with it echoes of Benjamin's conception of *messianic time*. For Benjamin messianic time is the transcendence of the present, which appears and interrupts the continuity of history precisely to recontextualize the potentiality of the present by resolutely looking into the past. He claims that

the present, which, as a model of Messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgment, co-

93 *ibid*, 222

incides exactly with the stature which the history of mankind has in the universe.⁹⁴

This conception of time inverts both humanist historicism and Marxist historical materialism, or those treatments of time that are content in “establishing a causal connection between various moments in history.”⁹⁵ While Benjamin’s critique of humanist historicism also appears in *Tiqqun*, it must be noted that a major distinction emerges between their positions about interruptions to this temporally linear progress.

Fundamental to this divergence is an understanding of Benjamin’s messianic time as rooted in stasis, a freezing of *the storm of progress*. It is a “Messianic cessation of happening, or put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.”⁹⁶ This cessation is inextricably linked to the past. Through this interruption, one can divorce temporality from its supposed existence within a causal chain. Messianic time reveals its transcendence precisely in its ability to pause causality itself—a leftover from Enlightenment notions of progress. Benjamin claims that
a historian who takes this as his point of

94 op cit, “These on the Philosophy of History”, 263

95 ibid, 263

96 ibid, 263

departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus, he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.⁹⁷

Here, the Benjaminian historian evades the logic of progress by pausing to view the structure of the present within a discursive field that looks to the past not as a spectrum or continuum, but rather as a sort of "abridgment" with the present.

Tiqqun's rhetoric around ruptures and breaks in the continuity of history has less to do with situating the present, and more with expressing a collective potentiality that is inherently *alter-historical*. They argue that interruptions in history's progress function in tandem with the introduction of "lines of rupture, alliances and discontinuities into the smooth space of democratic society [...]"⁹⁸ These "lines of rupture" and "discontinuities" are part of a conception of history informed not merely by *interruption alone* as Benjamin's is, but rather by interruption coupled with the departure, exodus,

97 *ibid*, 263

98 *op cit*, *Introduction to Civil War*, 122

and desertion from history itself. They claim that rather than new critiques, new cartographies are what we need. Cartographies not for Empire, but for lines of flight out of it. [...] Tools for *orientation*. That don't try to say or represent what is within different archipelagoes of desertion, but show us how to meet up with them.⁹⁹

Thus, for Tiqqun it is not enough to have a cessation within history; one must go further to positions which exist entirely independent of its "homogeneous, empty time."¹⁰⁰ Here history homogenizes a plurality of temporalities, and sets all experience along the trajectory of a progressive historicism. Tiqqun claims that

there is an official history of the State in which the State seems to be the one and only actor, in which the advances of the state monopoly on the political are so many battles chalked up against an enemy who is invisible, imaginary, and precisely *without history*.¹⁰¹

Through a rhetoric that removes the historical imperatives of whatever is aligned against it, the

99 *ibid*, 216

100 *op cit*, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 261

101 *op cit*, *Introduction to Civil War*, 111

state preemptively invalidates all competing claims to history.

This preemptive obfuscation effectively sublimates a

counter-history, written from the viewpoint of civil war, in which the stakes of all these ‘advancements,’ the dynamics of the modern State, can be glimpsed. This counter-history reveals a political monopoly that is constantly threatened by the recomposition of autonomous worlds, of non-state collectivities.¹⁰²

Thus, for Tiqqun, unlike Benjamin, the interruptive nature of a new philosophy of history must necessarily expose lines of potentiality for new “non-state collectivities” to emerge from the rupture of the progressive linearity of humanist or Marxist-materialist historicisms. They prescriptively argue that one must

become attentive to the taking-place of things, of beings. To their event. To the obstinate and silent salience of their own temporality beneath the planetary flattening of all temporalities by the time of urgency.¹⁰³

102 *ibid*, 111

103 *ibid*, 211

By recovering a temporality that emerges from a rupture within the dominant temporality—the crushing weight of progressive history—a form-of-life effectively abandons its own implicated positionality within history and necessarily comes into contact with “the *abyss* of presence.”¹⁰⁴

The argumentative basis of Tiqqun’s short essay “How is it to be done?”, included at the end of the Semiotext(e) version of *Introduction to Civil War*, addresses precisely *how* one engages against Empire. While a somewhat practical response to the analysis of Empire in *Introduction to Civil War*, it can also be read not only as manual for the desertion of Empire but also for the desertion of humanism as well. Within its polemic arc, “How is it to be done?” explicitly critiques several control apparatuses which it attributes primarily to Empire, yet does not ignore the role humanism played in the creation of these sites of domination.

The construction of the individual as autonomous subject stems from Enlightenment thought, but as Tiqqun argues, it witnesses its most refined form in the context of Empire. In response to the process of subjectification, which Tiqqun argues is one of Empire’s most

104 *ibid*, 210

prominent capabilities to exert domination, desubjectification is a possible way out of this logic of totalizing control. Central to their understanding of desubjectification is the notion that it must be done communally, with partisan forms-of-life. Tiqqun writes:

The experience of my desubjectivization. I *become* a whatever singularity. [...] In the eyes of a being who, being present, wants to assess me *for what I am*, I savor the disappointment, *his* disappointment of seeing me become so *common*, so perfectly *accessible*. In the gestures of another, it is an unexpected complicity. All that isolates me as a *subject*, as a body endowed with a public configuration of attributes, I feel it founder. [...] Does one ever escape alone from the prison of the Self? In a squat. In an orgy. In a riot. In a train or an occupied village. We meet again. We meet again *as whatever singularities*. That is to say not on the basis of a common belonging, but of a *common presence*. Thus is our *need for communism*. The need for nocturnal spaces, where we can meet up beyond our predicates. Beyond the *tyranny* of recognition.¹⁰⁵

This whole trajectory of thought, outlining the move towards desubjectification, runs counter to the humanist notion of hermeneutically uncovering some fundamental universal human essence. It also runs counter to orthodox Marxist conceptions of ascribing the “revolutionary subject” as a predicative identity placed onto an entire class of individuals as a means to foment the revolutionary moment. Instead of adopting newer and more nuanced predicative identities, Tiqqun advocates the abandonment of all subjectivities as they are innately in the service of prolonging the control of Empire. This happens through the ways that identities are always reintegrated into discourses of domination by the rational logic inherent in the recognition of a subject *as a subject* (a conglomeration of all of its affective ties, identities, and predicates). Tiqqun claims that

the more I am *recognized*, the more my gestures are hindered, hindered *from within*. And here I am caught in the ultra-tight meshwork of the new power. In the impalpable snares of the new police: THE IMPERIAL POLICE OF QUALITIES.¹⁰⁶

Thus, if Empire, and by extension the humanis-

106 *ibid*, 206

tic impulse, is aimed at affirming such qualities of the individual subject, Tiqqun's argument rests on the disavowal of all such qualitative renderings of ontology. In fact, Tiqqun seems to dismiss the whole notion of metaphysical ontology in its entirety, as they are much more concerned with ethical positions, instead of constructions of being.

After their dismissal of the humanist project to construct, valorize, and protect a universal essence, Tiqqun goes on to challenge the whole deterministic notion of rationality/reason. A subject-centered rationality arises from the development of epistemological reason during the Enlightenment, and it is this form of reason that argues that absolute knowledge is a conceptual objective that can indeed be worked toward (progress) with the ultimate aim of fully understanding or possessing it. Here Tiqqun again takes a distinctively anti-humanist approach. They argue that resisting Empire requires an ethical approach informed by the "how?" and not the "what?" of conventional politics of resistance in the past. They argue that "*How to?*" is actually

a *question* of means. Not a question of goals, or *objectives*, of what there is *to do*,

strategically, in the absolute. A question of what one *can* do, tactically, in a situation, and of the *acquisition* of this power.¹⁰⁷

Thus, the absolutism so prevalent in Enlightenment theories is problematized and inverted to reveal the need for plural, immediate, local, and always contextual, forms of resistance. It is the trading-in of grand theories of resistance for the acknowledgement of all the potentialities present in a given situation. In this way, through the proliferation of all potentialities within all differentiated contexts, Tiqqun's anti-program of resistance finds its tactical strength: its ability to become amorphous, opaque, and invisible.

Against Enlightenment rationalism and certainty that deductive reasoning can bring all knowledge to light, the calls of Tiqqun for invisibility, obfuscation, and opacity form another arm of their anti-humanism. They argue that

there is an opacity inherent to the *contact* between bodies. And that is incompatible with the imperial reign of a light that no longer illuminates things *except to break them down*¹⁰⁸

This "imperial reign of a light" can extend to the

107 *ibid*, 209

108 *ibid*, 218

critique of humanist rationality. In the socio-historical context of Empire, “reason” is no longer benign or impartial—it is fully integrated in apparatuses of domination, as it seeks to “illuminate things” only to “break them down.” This is similar to the fascist logic behind progressive historical linearity that Benjamin warned against.

These sites where commensurate forms-of-life find each other, Tiqqun calls “Zones of Offensive Opacity.” They are “delimited space[s]” of “political anonymity,” “bound together by an intense circulation of bodies and affects between bodies.”¹⁰⁹ This is the invisible terrain created by an ethics of civil war where forms-of-life aligned against the totality of Empire enact an immediate communism of the present—where the rupture with history manifests as a site of insurrection. Contrary to the previous failed politics of resistance, which offer conceptions of alternate modes of existence to late-capitalism or Empire, “Zones of Offensive Opacity do not have to be created.”¹¹⁰ This is the ahistorical privileging of the present-moment, as Tiqqun goes on to claim that these zones

are already there, in any kind of relation

109 *ibid*, 218

110 *ibid*, 218–19

that brings about a veritable putting into play of bodies. What's needed is to *embrace* the fact that we take part in this opacity. And to give ourselves the means to spread it, defend it.¹¹¹

Because Tiqqun wages its polemical attack at the level of the individual, of absolute knowledge, of rationality, and of historical progress, a new offensive logic of resistance to Empire emerges in their work. The diffusion of the unrecognizable becomes central to the war against Empire—the spreading of that which cannot be reduced to simple predicates or identities, the proliferation of a radical uncertainty, and a collective penchant or ethical inclination for the irrational. Each of these positions stems entirely from a position vehemently opposed to the last vestiges of humanist thinking. By explicitly advocating the desertion of Empire, Tiqqun advocates the desertion of humanism.

111 *ibid*, 219

4

Power and the Development of Empire: The Absolutist, Liberal, and Welfare State and the Emergence of Biopower in Tiquun's *Introduction to Civil War*

In *Introduction to Civil War* (*Introduction à la guerre civile*) Tiquun describes the sociopolitical terrain upon which anticapitalist militants engage with late-capitalist power relations—a terrain which has dramatically shifted from classical Marxist conceptions of historical materialist class struggle. They argue that this terrain can no longer be conceived of as mono-directional exploitation, but now only as discursive relations of domination. They argue that the social field of late-capitalism has undoubtedly evolved, and the forms of the modern state and its correlated forms of power have also developed. Thus, in order to conceive of

effective resistance to domination one must necessarily chart the changes in control and its relationship to the state-form. Tiqqun outlines the development of the modern state—from the absolutist state, to the liberal state, and finally to the welfare state—that leads up to their conception of what they call Empire. Empire is what remains when the practices, techniques, and apparatuses of domination have outlived and developed beyond all of the forms that once justified its control. Understanding Tiqqun's critique of Empire requires an evaluation of the development of the modern state-form and its relations to earlier forms of power. The modern state is entirely dependent on the articulation of its power relations, until Empire emerges and complicates this relationship by actively dissolving the state-form itself through the totalizing proliferation of biopower. At each stage of the modern state's development, an accompanying form of power emerges, until it finds its most refined expression in biopower, the power dynamic of Empire.

Before exploring Tiqqun's understanding of Empire, we must trace the historical development of the modern state that they argue eventually gives way to Empire itself. They ar-

gue the modern state has gone through roughly three transitions, which correspond to stages in the development of capitalism, before it ultimately amalgamates into Empire: the absolutist state (that of the classical sovereign), the liberal state, and the welfare state. These are unique developmental stages of the state, though each is entirely dependent on the previous form, and each has a corresponding form of power relations. Tiqqun claims that

the modern State fails in three ways: first, as the absolutist State, then as the liberal State, and soon after as the Welfare State. The passage from one to the other can only be understood in relation to three successive corresponding forms of civil war: the wars of religion, class struggle, and the Imaginary Party.¹¹²

Thus, communism, in its nascent form as Tiqqun's concept of civil war, has always had a certain historical immanence—precisely in the fact that the semblance of stasis and pacification in all three developmental stages of the modern state has always had antagonistic elements which actively contribute to the state's destabilization.

112 *ibid*, 106

Tiqqun calls “‘communism’ the real movement that elaborates, everywhere and at every moment, civil war.”¹¹³ Civil war necessarily takes on an ethical dimension, as “civil war is the free play of forms-of-life; it is the principle of their coexistence.”¹¹⁴ They conceive of the modern state as the form that attempts to nullify potentiality of forms-of-life coming together, and the inherent violence of such comings together. Tiqqun most fully elucidates their concept of civil war in *Introduction to Civil War* in the following passage:

War, because in each singular play between forms-of-life, the possibility of a fierce confrontation—the possibility of violence—can *never* be discounted. Civil, because the confrontation between forms-of-life is not like that between States—a coincidence between a population and a territory—but like the confrontation between *parties*, in the sense this word had before the advent of the modern State. And because we must be precise from now on, we should say that forms-of-life confront one another as *partisan war machines*.¹¹⁵

113 *ibid*, 63

114 *ibid*, 32

115 *ibid*, 33

These confrontations of forms-of-life are ethical confrontations in that forms-of-life are mere ethical inclinations or leanings-toward. It is because of this semblance of singularity that antagonistic forms-of-life preclude, that all such confrontations form “partisan war machines.”

According to Tiqqun, the absolutist state arises immediately after the pacification of the first European civil war—the wars of religion. They claim that

in both theory and practice, the modern State came into being in order to put an end to civil war, then called ‘wars of religion.’ Therefore, both historically and by its own admission, it is *secondary* vis-à-vis civil war.”¹¹⁶

Assuming that pre-Reformation Christianity maintained hegemony in Europe, Tiqqun claims that the Protestant Reformation and the conflicts between groups like the Schmalkaldic League and the Catholic Church represented some of the most significant breaks of unifying social positions. Subsequently, after the pacification of this first “civil war” (through the lessening of religious violence) the modern state, in its first absolutist form,

116 *ibid*, 72

bursts on the scene with the task of reconstituting this unity—secularized, this time—no longer as an organic whole but instead as a *mechanical* whole, as a *machine*, as a conscious artificiality.¹¹⁷

Thus, the modern state acts not as an alternate means to reconstruct social unity, but rather reconstitutes it according to completely new and fabricated means. Here representation within a social field becomes an obvious part of social existence.

Early Protestantism operated according to a doctrine which destabilized this idea of “organic” unity by creating a rupture “between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, between inner man and outer man.”¹¹⁸ The first form of the modern state, the absolutist state, carries on this bifurcating impetus of Protestantism, only now in a secular manner. This bifurcation through the absolutist state allows for the first and perhaps most fundamental distinction of statecraft to emerge: the belief that

henceforth there shall be on the one hand an ‘absolutely free,’ private, moral conscience and on the other hand public, po-

117 *ibid*, 74

118 *ibid*, 75

litical action ‘absolutely subject to State Reason.’¹¹⁹

This split between the public and private spheres informs the developmental logic of the modern state and capitalism. The “public” being “absolutely subject to State Reason” becomes the theoretical support for the controlling form of sovereignty itself.

This rise of the sovereign in the absolutist state is the secular reintroduction of the metaphysical conception of “The One,” which fully unifies and contains within it *everything else*. Yet, as mentioned earlier, it is a mechanized and fabricated appropriation and reconstitution of “The One.” Throughout the subsequent developments of the modern state, it becomes a central concern of the state to preserve and perpetuate this fiction of unity when in fact there is nothing but conflictual plurality and hostility. Tiqqun argues that the “public” is simply the fictive techniques that the modern State will employ to artificially maintain the fiction of the One. Its entire reality will be concentrated in these techniques, through which it will ensure the maintenance of Order, only now that of an outside order, a

119 *ibid*, 77

*public order.*¹²⁰

Thus, the development of capitalism and the development of the modern state also have a third parallel in the rise of representation, which functions as an attempt to “ensure the maintenance [or appearance] of Order.” Thus with each concurrent stage of state development a corresponding reality mediated by representation appears—until of course the Spectacle appears with Empire as a social reality entirely mediated by representation itself.

In Tiqqun’s account of the modern state, the absolutist state gives way to the liberal state when the freedom (control) exerted by the sovereign (which represses all other freedoms) becomes less effective and ultimately untenable. As a result, the liberal state inverts the rhetoric of the absolutist state by arguing that it is through the preservation of individual liberty that control can most efficiently be enacted. It acquiesces to the logic that if indeed the state’s ultimate goal is to “ensure the maintenance of Order,” then allowing the individual subjects who comprise the public/social sphere to operate under the pretense of individual freedom is a more effective means of control than the bla-

120 *ibid*, 37

tant control exercised by the sovereign. Tiqqun argues that

the liberal State is a frugal State, which claims to exist only to ensure the free play of individual liberties, and to this end it begins by extorting interests from each body, so that it can attach them to these bodies and reign peacefully across this new abstract world: ‘the phenomenal republic of interests’ (Foucault).¹²¹

This marks a shift in the relationship between the individual and the modern state. Whereas the absolutist state cared little about the affective persuasions of its subjects, the liberal state’s entire framework of control requires a tacit understanding of essential or inalienable rights (or “interests”) so that the liberal state can grant these rights/interests back to the subjects as an act of good faith. Hence the rise of Enlightenment-era thinking with its rhetoric of freedom, justice, and liberty.

The subjects of the liberal state fail to recognize that these inalienable rights are not in and of themselves external to the logic that purports to protect them—ie the liberal state itself. They are in reality fabricated products of the

121 *ibid*, 107

functioning of the liberal state; they are inseparable from the rhetoric of this episteme and only find meaning within its discourse. The liberal state, Tiquun argues,

claims it exists only to keep things in good order, for the proper functioning of 'civil society,' which is absolutely a thing of its own creation.¹²²

Tiquun argues that the liberal state in Europe saw its high point between the years of 1815 and 1914, and the outbreak of World War I complicated the further encroachment of the liberal state. Foucault argues that the beginnings of bio-power and biopolitical practices come into existence between 1815 and 1914, concurrent with the slow displacement of sovereign power. Tiquun quotes Foucault's analysis of the beginnings of disciplinary techniques:

'I have drawn attention to the fact that the development, dramatic rise, and dissemination throughout society of these famous disciplinary techniques for taking charge of the behavior of individuals day by day and in its fine detail is exactly contemporaneous with the age of freedoms.'¹²³

122 *ibid*, 107

123 *ibid*, 107-08

Here, under the pretense of liberalism and of humanistic ‘freedoms,’ this incarnation of the modern state begins to control individuals at the level of the body and life-itself.

Foucault’s work on the dissemination of disciplinary techniques in institutions as disparate, yet integrally connected, as psychiatric institutions and prisons finds that these disciplinary techniques developed in tandem with the liberal state. It is at this point of historical development that Tiqqun identifies “security” as inseparable from the liberal state’s grounding in individual freedom. Security here is a form of preemptive knowledge-collecting that effectively deters any threats to individual freedom. Thus, security is rooted in knowledge, that is explicitly tied to the liberal state’s means of control—ie knowledge as a means to power.

Tiqqun argues that in order to *grant* this presumptive fallacy of individual freedom *to* the individual itself, the liberal state must know everything in order to preemptively secure any threats to this individual freedom, thereby making individual freedom a relation which is inherently managed and mediated, and in actuality furthest away from the theoretical conception of individual freedom as possible. They claim that

the State that ‘wishes to govern just enough so that it can govern the least’ must in fact *know* everything, and it must develop a set of practices and technologies to do it.¹²⁴

This marks a decisive difference between power relations in the liberal state and power relations in Empire (which will be explored later in this essay). Here power functions in a transitory phase somewhere between the decline of absolute sovereignty and the beginnings of biopower. The liberal state, which in order to grant its subjects individual freedom “must in fact *know* everything” about what its subjects are doing or even capable of doing (this informs the preventative approach), is still a reactive form of power, rather than a productive one like biopower is.

To say the liberal state’s form of power relations are reactive and not productive is to say that in order to control its citizens the state responds to individual desires rather than helping to create them. This distinction between productive/constructive and reactive/responsive cannot be overlooked in the development of the modern state’s power relations. Power relations within the liberal state exist almost exclusively

124 *ibid*, 108

at the reactive/responsive end of the spectrum, for while power is no longer sovereign as in the absolutist state, it still tries to control the individual subject by understanding the subject's desires, persuasions, and inclinations. Security enters into this discourse as a means to understand individual desires, persuasions, and inclinations *before* they are enacted (preemptively).

The liberal state's expansive institutions and techniques for control are not based on developing individual desires to secure control over political subjects—this development does not happen until biopower begins to supplant absolutist power during the epoch of the welfare state. Tiqqun claims:

Witness here the insidious way in which the liberal State will perfect the modern State, under the pretext of needing to penetrate everywhere in order to avoid being everywhere in actuality, that in order to leave its subjects alone it must know everything. The principle of the liberal State could be stated like this: 'If control and discipline are everywhere, the State does not have to be so'.¹²⁵

Thus, the explicit totalizing control of the abso-

125 *ibid*, 108

lutist sovereign is sublimated and inverted. Power is internalized by the subject and now operates implicitly and often subconsciously.

With the rise of the liberal state the modern state begins to turn power inward, thus it is also at this time that one sees the rise of pervasive disciplinary techniques, which in a very subdued way exert a totalizing field of preemptive control (eg Bentham's panopticon). This is so much the case that in *Birth of Biopolitics*, as quoted by Tiqqun, Foucault claims that

government, initially limited to the function of supervision, is only to intervene when it sees that something is not happening according to the general mechanics of behavior, exchange, and economic life. [...] The Panopticon is the very formula of liberal government.¹²⁶

The important distinction to note here within the liberal governance schema is that it is "limited to the function of supervision." Again, this is purely reactive/responsive in that its conception of control stops at understanding the pure potentiality of the governed political subjects and goes no further. "Further" in this context would entail not only the absolute knowledge of the potenti-

126 *ibid*, 108

ality of governed political subjects, *but also* the ability to prescriptively construct what potentialities are even possible for the governed subjects in question. This shift, from a purely reactive/responsive control to one that uses productive/constructive apparatuses, marks the beginning of the modern welfare state.

Tiqun argues that the transition from the liberal state to the welfare state is marked by two complementary shifts: because the liberal state extended the supervisory reach of the state into realms once considered entirely within the social (implying that such a distinction between the state and the social actually existed before this time), it must follow that the state itself integrate aspects of the “social.” They claim that

ultimately the ‘state-ification’ of the social had to be paid for by the socialization of the State, and thus leads to the mutual dissolution of both the State and society.¹²⁷

Thus, because these shifts complement each other, they both contribute to the indistinguishability of the state and the social.

Here, in the development of the welfare state, Empire starts to emerge. The welfare state is the last vestige of the state-form within an

127 *ibid*, 110

emergent sociopolitical context that is reconciling any and all differences between state control and social control, both of which dissolve and give way to Empire. The distinction between the state and the social (fairly evident in the absolutist state and the liberal state) begins to break down. All relations and apparatuses of power in this form of the modern state become indistinguishable from that which is governed. This marks a fundamental change in the way in which power is contextualized, as power is completely subsumed into all social relations and it takes on a thoroughly productive/constructive character.

Tiqqun claims that what they called the 'Welfare State' was this indistinction (between society and state) in which the obsolete State-form survived for a little while within Empire.¹²⁸

Here the welfare state is portrayed as a form presenting itself purely as form (a fictional or place-holder form) within the reality of emergent Empire. Yet importantly, just as the welfare state is the last form of the modern state before its own obsolescence, so too according to Tiqqun, must one acknowledge that

128 *ibid*, 110

society no longer exists, at least in the sense of a differentiated whole. There is only a tangle of norms and mechanisms through which they hold together the scattered tatters of the global biopolitical fabric, through which they prevent its violent disintegration.¹²⁹

Thus, the welfare state, and Empire after it, merely holds together—through their productive apparatuses—the difference and plurality which threatens the very order it presupposes.

Here, one begins to see proto-Empire's need to maintain some semblance of order in older forms, which begin to reveal the productive/constructive component to its new logic of control—namely a further integration and proliferation of biopower. The implicit neurosis behind the different development of all statist forms

reveals a political monopoly that is constantly threatened by the recomposition of autonomous worlds, of non-state collectivities.¹³⁰

It is this fear, this ever-present threat, that informs the welfare state's proliferation of new disciplinary techniques which are no longer con-

129 *ibid*, 110

130 *ibid*, 111

tent with merely *understanding* what controlled subjects are capable of, but now extends control further into *producing* control through the maintenance and *production* of the subject's life itself. By fully extending into all social fields and socializing the state itself, control (within the welfare state and later within Empire) functions by granting the means to life for each individual under its domination.

The reasoning behind this totalizing encroachment is that anywhere an uncontested space exists within the social, a space ostensibly free from externalized control, the potential to reconstitute "non-state collectivities" poses too great a threat to the authority of the modern state and thus all uncontested social space must be occupied and politicized. Tiqqun claims that:

Whenever the State left something to the 'private' sphere, to 'civil society,' whenever it declared something to be insignificant, non-political, it left just enough room for the free play of forms-of-life such that, from one moment to the next, the monopoly on the political appears to be in dispute. This is how the State is led, either slowly or in a violent gesture, to encompass the totality of social activity, to take

charge of the totality of man's existence.¹³¹

This taking "charge of the totality of man's [sic] existence" finds its furthest extension in taking charge in the most fundamental way—constructing and guaranteeing individual existence itself or that which "sanctioned the *right to life*."¹³² This construction of existence takes as its most invasive form the construction and proliferation of subjectivities, or in Foucauldian terms, the process of subjectification. This is not to claim, however, that processes of subjectification, or the production of subjectivities, is unique to the welfare state. It is simply a matter of scale, for the welfare state is the beginning of subjectification en masse. Tiqqun elaborates on this point:

The Welfare State, which first took over for the liberal State within Empire, is the product of a massive diffusion of disciplines and regimes of subjectivation peculiar to the liberal State.¹³³

Thus, this form of power which produces and implicates is not by any means an entirely new conception of power dynamics, but its proliferation into all aspects of the social is a defining

131 *ibid*, 111

132 *ibid*, 111

133 *ibid*, 112

feature of the welfare state as proto-Empire.

The final shift of state development which Tiqqun outlines is actually the dissolution of domination's reliance on the *state-as-form*: it is the total subsumption of the state-form into the radically posited concept of Empire. Tiqqun claims that the obsolescence of the state-form is entirely due to the state coming to terms with the impossibility of its own development. In developing beyond the welfare state the state-form encounters its own limits, precisely because its attempts at mediating all social existence and giving everything an explicit political dimension necessitates an ethical dimension to its own existence. Thus, the state-form itself takes on an antagonistic ethical inclination, one based on the impetus to dominate *everything*. Because the state

wanted to concentrate the monopoly of the political [it] ended up politicizing everything; all aspects of life had become political, not in themselves as singular entities, but precisely insofar as the State, by taking a position, had there too formed itself into a *party*.¹³⁴

This formation of a *party*, a distinct ethical pre-

¹³⁴ *ibid*, 112

disposition, a form-of-life only concerned with the eradication of all other forms-of-life, shows the utter self-contradiction the state-form faces now in the twilight of the welfare state and the emergence of Empire. This contradiction is subject to the state-form's ethical inclination to wage "everywhere its war against civil war, [which] above all propagated hostility toward itself."¹³⁵ Thus, when faced with this inherent developmental contradiction the state not only dissolves, but so too does the social—or perhaps more accurately, the state and the social dissolve into the amalgamated mass of bodies, subjects, apparatuses, power relations, markets, and productive disciplinary mechanisms of Empire.

In analyzing the development of the modern state through its successive forms, Tiqqun arrives at Empire, which supplants the notion of the state itself. They posit Empire as an entirely new framework, responding to and arising from the contradiction of the modern state, that

the history of the modern State is the history of its struggle against its own impossibility—that is, the history of its being overwhelmed by the profusion of tech-

135 *ibid*, 112

niques it has deployed to ward off this impossibility. Empire is, to the contrary, the *assumption of both this impossibility* and these techniques.¹³⁶

Thus, Empire is a mode of control that does away with the need to do something other than governance (ie maintain essential human rights or uphold justice); it fully inhabits the absurdity of making every social relation an act of governance with no pretensions to anything but that. In this way, “Empire is the *turning inside out* of the *liberal State*.”¹³⁷ This “turning inside out” takes the liberalist notion that individual freedom is sacred and that a government governs best when it governs least, and completely absorbs and dominates everything outside of the realm of control—or at least subjects the outside to a totalizing schema in which nothing is apolitical any longer.

This is an important distinction to raise between the modern state and Empire. Because Empire accelerates the collapse of the social into the political and the political into the social, even the notion of the modern state as something external to that which it controls is problematized

136 *ibid*, 116

137 *ibid*, 116

and subverted. Empire becomes the act of *living domination*, or put another way, within Empire, domination is no longer exerted but completely created and implicated by whatever lives it. Thus, “the history of Empire does not take up where the modern State leaves off.”¹³⁸ Instead, it is what happens when the modern state exists as pure form, an outdated signifier no longer corresponding to the reality of power relations. Empire reifies itself through the mere lived experience of it. Tiqqun elucidates this new departure by arguing:

When we speak of a turning inside out, we are referring to the final possibility of an exhausted system, which folds back onto itself in order, in a mechanical fashion, to collapse in on itself. The Outside becomes the Inside, and the Inside now has no limits.¹³⁹

Here, one witnesses the profound ramifications this “turning inside out” actually has in an ontological context, for if “the Inside now has no limits” then all the ways in which individuals create predicative subjectivity are merely ways for Empire to extend its logic of domination.

138 *ibid*, 117

139 *ibid*, 117

When the individual subject sees itself as a particular predicative identity, or even as an individual subject, it is merely evoking the myriad of ways in which the Outside (the non- or a-political) has now become internally politicized. The more the imperial subject uses these discourses of plurality and alterity, the further they implicate themselves within Empire's rhizomatic structuring of control.

To understand Empire's techniques of management and control, one must first understand how Tiquun argues the liberal state exerted its control—namely through the police and publicity. The police, in the conventional understanding of the term, kept “watch over the living”¹⁴⁰ and reacted/responded when the situation warranted it. Their goal: to quickly reestablish whatever one-dimensional control was lost. On the other end of the liberal state's spectrum of control, publicity was concerned with creating the appearance of a space ostensibly open to all (the *politeia*) within the state-form. This public sphere, in order to fulfill its role as named, operated on the pretense that a part of lived existence was purely common (ie reducible) between political subjects. Both these poles of the

140 *ibid*, 118

liberal state's control, that of the police and of the public sphere, operate on two distinct levels with regards to the subjugated population: "first, on its 'body,' and second on its 'soul'."¹⁴¹

With the emergence of Empire, direct policing is no longer necessary, as biopower supplants the police, and the Spectacle (in the Debordian sense) supplants the public sphere. Biopower proves to be a more effective means for control (as will be discussed later in this essay) precisely because it begins to dominate not only the literal bodies of the imperial subjects, but their affective desires and persuasions as well. Biopower guaranteed the right to life, thus it allows for the production of subjectivities that are already fully delineated by Empire before they are even produced. The Spectacle proves to be a more effective means for control, just as Guy Debord claims in *Society of the Spectacle*, because it is not merely a perpetual onslaught of mass media images; much more troubling, the Spectacle is when all social relations are completely mediated by representations.

Instead of the public sphere—which leaves open the dangerous possibility, from the modern state's point of view, for non-statist col-

141 *ibid*, 118

lectivities to emerge—the Spectacle adopts a preventative stance here by precluding all interactions that *can ever even* occur within the social by mediating all of them (hence, the collapse of the distinctions between the social and the state in Empire). Through this development of techniques of domination (as opposed to the development of state-forms), Tiqqun ultimately can argue that

from this point on, the State does not disappear, it is simply *demoted* beneath a transterritorial set of autonomous practices: Spectacle, Biopower.”¹⁴²

One must understand that Tiqqun is not merely outlining the techniques of domination *for* Empire, but rather positing that Empire has no form in and of itself, but is *only* a disparate array of techniques of domination that persist when form has become dispensable.

Before leaving Empire, in order to focus on the main discursive form of power which accompanies it, we should discuss its use as a term outside of its obvious historical trappings. The term “Empire” is appropriated from Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, who in their book of the same name use it to denote a shift away from imperialism based on the rule of nation-

¹⁴² *ibid*, 118

states, to a new postmodern conception of imperialism which extends beyond the nation-state in the form of multinational corporate conglomerations or global financial management organizations like the World Trade Organization or the International Monetary Fund. Tiqqun takes this notion of Empire one step further, arguing that

if Empire is the assumption of the modern State's impossibility, it is also the assumption of the impossibility of imperialism.¹⁴³

Imperialism here extends beyond the classical sense of the term to critique Negri and Hardt's conception of multinational-financial Empire as well. Imperialism has become impossible because it presupposes that there are spaces (material and ontological) left for Empire (in the Tiqqunist sense) to colonize, when this is simply no longer the case as all discursive fields have been fully delineated by Empire. Thus, Tiqqun's logic here indicates that decolonization is not actually aligned against Empire, but is merely a new mode of domination. They claim that

decolonization means: the elaboration of new forms of horizontal, sub-institution-

143 *ibid*, 119

al power that *function better* than the old ones.”¹⁴⁴

As problematic as this reading of decolonization is, it nonetheless supports their argument—namely that Empire is nothing but the proliferation of (new) techniques of domination without an overarching form external to that which it dominates.

Tiqqun’s argument is that just as the modern State has almost innocuously changed into Empire, so too has the way that power functions within this new discursive paradigm. Relying heavily on Foucault, Tiqqun argues that power no longer functions according to the classical conception of juridical sovereignty and now is entirely enmeshed with the control, domination, and further propagation (under its own terms) of life itself. Thus, the form of power under Empire is Foucault’s biopower, or power that doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.¹⁴⁵

This conception of power is explicitly productive, as it moves away from the wholly negative

144 *ibid*, 119

145 Foucault, Michel. *Power*. 1994. 120

function of power as that which limits or represses. The classical conception of sovereign power is that it demands deference through the explicit threat that the political or economic subject's life can be taken as reparations for the refusal to acquiesce to control. Biopower is power that is not the arbiter of death, but rather the guarantor of life itself. Control is exerted precisely through its productive capacities. This sociohistorical shift accounts for the difference between power that represses and power that dominates.

Foucault claims that
in defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power, one identifies power with a law that says no—power is taken, above all, as carrying the force of a prohibition.¹⁴⁶

Tiqqun sees this earlier form of power as synonymous with the modern State and the Hobbesian social contract. As they write:

We know from experience the terms of the Hobbesian transaction between the subject and the sovereign: 'I exchange my liberty for your protection. As compensation

146 *ibid*, 120

for my unwavering obedience, you must offer my safety'.¹⁴⁷

Thus, the secession of the individual subject's freedom is obvious. Seen in this way, the subject's very existence is tempered by the limits predetermined by the sovereign—it is subject to an external field of delineation. Resistance to repressive power used the rhetoric of a freedom purely based in opposition, one of dialectical prefiguration, precisely because repressive power allows for such reductive interpretations.

The terrain has shifted, and sovereign/repressive power has given way to biopower. Foucault asks:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it?¹⁴⁸

This question retroactively addresses a fundamental aspect of Tiqqun's theoretical project; as they often depict Empire as totalizing yet ephemeral, ever-present but inconspicuous—how then can one account for the level of control that forms-of-life individuated by Empire are subject to without resorting to theories of explicit coercion? The an-

147 op cit, *Introduction to Civil War*, 89

148 op cit, *Power*, 120

swer lies in biopower's ability to produce and circulate individuated approximations of freedom which are in fact nothing but the further reinscription and recuperation of subjects back into the biopolitical fabric of domination. Foucault claims that this shift forms the basis of a

[...] new 'economy' of power [...] that is to say, procedures that allowed the effects of power to circulate in a manner at once continuous, uninterrupted, adapted and 'individualized' throughout the entire social body. These new techniques are both much more efficient and much less wasteful.¹⁴⁹

Biopower's ability to circulate is inherently productive, and because of this, even individual freedoms are tolerated within this schema as they simply reinforce the ways in which the political subject implicates itself within the domination of Empire.

Tiqqun, like Foucault before them, argues that biopower is a more effective form of policing because it can produce forms of control that are almost entirely preventative. They argue that biopower has supplanted the modern state's literal need for the police precisely because all institutions and their apparatuses are

149 *ibid*, 120

already inherently policing institutions. Thus they argue that

[...] in a manner largely independent of national States, these sub-institutional practices give birth to the two super-institutional poles of Empire: the police becomes Biopower, and publicity is transformed into the Spectacle. From this point on, the State does not disappear, it is simply *demoted* beneath a transterritorial set of autonomous practices: Spectacle, Biopower.¹⁵⁰

The affective network of apparatuses which control bodies, psychologies, and subjectivities coalesces into the “super-institutional” locus of biopower’s control. Thus, when power turns the political or economic subject, in orthodox-Marxian language, into biopolitical beings, bodies form a rhizome of affirmative power relations that become amalgamated to a point that is impossible to isolate its individual components. At that point, one sees Biopower function as one of the “super-institutional” poles of Empire. Matthew G. Hannah argues that within the political context of the state

the status of biopolitical beings [is] precisely in the measure that they become

150 op cit, *Introduction to Civil War*, 118

legal subjects of rights, beings whose ‘life’ is to be fostered, protected and optimized for the sake of the ‘economy’, ‘society’ or ‘nation’.¹⁵¹

This biopolitical turn views the implicated bodies as integral to domination and control—not external to it.

Tiqqun’s discourse around biopower posits a historical rendering of the ontology of control. They argue, somewhat ambiguously, that at some point, control found its *becoming* precisely in its own alterity. Yet, in the developmental shift from the modern state into Empire, everything that had its source in the Outside [...] is *administered* and therefore taken up in an *integration* that *positively* eliminates these exteriorities in order to allow them to recirculate.¹⁵²

Thus, just as capitalism in the West has shifted away from its classical foundation in production to the circulation of information and financial abstractions, so too has the ontology of control shifted to circulation—the circulation of identities, subjectivities, and inclinations. Em-

151 Hannah, Matthew G. “Biopower, Life and Left Politics.” *Antipode*. 43.4 (2011) 1043

152 op cit, *Introduction to Civil War*, 131

pire exists as the conglomeration of all mediating apparatuses which allow for the circulation of these things.

The cessation of productive exteriorities here allows for Empire to assume a totalizing form. Thus, all of the ways that biopower seems to affirm the production of aspects of life are actually mere recirculations of forms that have already been made immanent. Tiqqun goes on to claim:

In this space, an ungraspable agency of totalization reigns, dissolving, digesting, absorbing and deactivating all alterity *a priori*. A process of omnivorous immanentization—reducing everything to nothing—deploys itself on a planetary scale. The goal: *make the world into continuous biopolitical tissue*.¹⁵³

Here biopower's affirmative production is radically stripped of any redemptive pretense and its inherent reductivism is made clear.

By allowing, tolerating, and fostering the affirmative impulses of life, biopower relinquishes direct control for implicit control—and the trade-off is much more effective in terms of domination, as it allows the biopolitical subject/body

153 *ibid*, 132

to implicate itself within a schema of prevention, nullification, and pacification. None of the productive affirmations of the biopolitical subject/body are in and of themselves breaks with forms of control, but rather they are subtle modifications to the dynamics of power which ultimately afford agency to a subject while having already managed and administered all possible forms this ostensible freedom could take. At this juncture, between agency and possibility, biopower assumes a necessarily preventative stance rooted in the security of potential futures.

For Tiqqun, biopower is one of the most developed forms of prevention and security because it can effectively evaluate all potentialities within a given discourse. They claim that it is “not that Biopower claims to govern men and things directly—instead, it governs *possibilities* and *conditions* of possibility.”¹⁵⁴ Biopower here functions as preemptive control, located within the biopolitical subject/body itself, so explicit policing can be reduced without relinquishing control. The biopolitical subject/body implicates itself within this schema of control willingly, as its sustenance and further propagation as a life-itself depends on it. To use an example: the biopo-

154 *ibid*, 131

litical subject who actively seeks care from an allopathic medical institution is at once a) asserting their agency (ie there is no coercion here on behalf of a sovereign), b) producing an affirmative affect towards life (ie seeking out medical care with the motive of prolonging life-itself), and c) willingly implicating itself in a system of information collection and biometric data processing. Thus, the biopolitical subject/body is at once productive (in that it helps refine and even create new systemic apparatuses of control), and affirmative (in that control in the classical repression/coercion model is no longer apparent, because of the subject/body's own presupposed agency in the entire matter). In this way, a diffuse field of controlling techniques is always in a state of refinement and creation, not external to the biopolitical subjects/bodies it ends up controlling but rather, precisely in reaction to the control of these subjects/bodies. This reactive element to biopolitical control shows how the further refinement of controlling techniques aims to govern all conditionalities and potentialities.

As critic Miguel De Larrinaga argues, at the root of the preventative security that informs biopower is

a form of power that disseminates through

society as an effective tool in power relations to normalize social acts and the conduct of populations.¹⁵⁵

This normalization, this de-intensification of energy and difference on a broad scale, as Foucault argues, shows how power is no longer “directed at man-as-body, but at man-as-species”. It is no longer the mere governance of individual-subjects in isolation, but rather the domination of whole groups of biopolitical subjects/bodies.

Biopower as management is inherently productive and affirmative. As a social project, it is aimed at the administration of life-itself; its very dominance depends on allowing the subjects it controls to have the ability to exercise their own agency and well-being. Done on a mass scale, this normalization (whether it is in sexuality, health, or social organization) functions to secure potential and preempt hypostatic deviance *before* it happens. For example, by basing the ideas of sexuality in heteronormativity, all other forms of sexuality are already problematized as deviant and therefore external to the hegemonic discourse. Furthermore, the normal-

155 De Larrinaga, Miguel and Marc Doucet. “Sovereign Power and the Biopolitics of Human Security.” *Security Dialogue*. 39 (2008). 520

ization of such a standard acts preventatively in that any conception of sexuality that has yet to be conceived of or articulated is already made deviant. Here, all possibilities of sexuality are already nullified in a preemptive state. Through expansive and relentless normalization biopower precludes most future-based alterities, and is a system of management grounded in its own circulation of norms.

Much as Foucault argues about sexuality, Tiqqun argues that late-capitalism has been normalized so exhaustively that even to conceive of social modes of organization that exist entirely independent to the late-capitalist construct becomes nearly impossible. In this sense, late-capitalist Empire is less about the material control of economic flows, nation-states, transnational corporations, etc, and more about a hegemonic discourse that has simultaneously normalized all facets of its own existence while effectively eliminating competing discourses of social organization. This is how biopower forms the discursive practice underlying Empire's immanence.

By outlining in *Introduction to Civil War* how the modern state evolved and is eventually subsumed by Empire, Tiqqun conceives of the concurrent shifts in power dynamics as integral

to understanding precisely how Empire has emerged. In this context, sovereign power becomes synonymous with the absolutist state; the emergence of biopower amidst sovereign power is indicative of the liberal state; the welfare state, because it is almost entirely dictated by biopower, is the last state-form to witness its own obsolescence; and finally Empire is the logical result of biopower's complete totalization. Like Foucault, Tiqqun argues that domination is entirely informed by the production, circulation, and implication of bodies/subjectivities within power dynamics. In Empire, power no longer functions in a mono-directional fashion; it forms a multiplicity of discursive networks that affirm and produce dominated life. The understanding of the state-form and its corresponding power dynamics presupposes that to resist the domination of Empire, a form-of-life that is inherently hostile to all aspects of Empire must first understand the terrain on which to fight. This understanding, this framing of the question as one of "How is it to be done?" as opposed to Lenin's "What is to be done?," provides ethical dimension to Tiqqun's project. Rather than offer prescriptive programs of prefigurative politics in *Introduction to Civil War*, they only offer an analysis of how Empire

dominates, in order to elucidate an ethics vehemently positioned against all domination and power.

“The Annihilation
of Nothingness”:

Tiqqun’s Transcendence of
Nihilism *Through* Nihilism,
Georges Bataille’s
Conception of Death, and
David McNally’s Living-Dead

For the Marxist cultural critic David McNally, the widespread character-trope of the zombie points to a deep-seated social anxiety about the catastrophism undergirding late-capitalism. He argues that the figure of the zombie, or the living-dead, aesthetically mirrors the death-like alienation from one’s own life within late-capitalism. Thus, the prolongation of “life” beyond death is complicit in the pervasive proliferation of late-capitalist power dynamics, but it also paradoxically acts as the very ontological transformation that precludes the dissolution of such domination. Similarly, the French philosopher Georges Bataille treats death as the funda-

mental reality, the delimiting force upon life. For Bataille, death is restorative, as it dissipates the existential interruption he posits is caused by life. Framed against these two treatments of death, Tiqqun argues that the only recourse to the totalizing domination of late-capitalism is to negate the latent nihilism inherent in late-capitalist power dynamics. In their essay "Silence and Beyond," Tiqqun claims that since late-capitalism is already a social space inhabited by the living-dead, the only position of attack left to anticapitalists is one which paradoxically attempts to negate the very nihilism inherent in late-capitalism itself. By situating such an argument against McNally's analysis of the living-dead, and tempered by Bataille's treatment of death, Tiqqun eschews prescriptive affirmations of non-capitalist alterities (arguing that there is no ontological or political *outside* to the dominance of late-capitalism), arguing instead that only the affirmative negativity of late-capitalism's complete nihilistic destruction can usher in its transcendence.

According to both David McNally and Tiqqun, a logic of nihilistic catastrophism has begun to emerge within the sociopolitical space of late-capitalism. Capitalist commodity exchange-

relations have effectively created a rhizomatic network of dominance across the entirety of the world in the 21st century; so much so, that as Tiqqun claims, it is now the era of the “authoritarian commodity” or the completion of capitalism’s quest for “real subsumption.” For Marx, “real subsumption,” as opposed to “formal subsumption,” was the historical moment in which there were no longer any pre-capitalist forms of production to be forcibly integrated into capitalist schema. For Tiqqun, the era of the “authoritarian commodity” is that in which the commodity-fetish, that metaphysical obfuscation of exchange-relations taking the place of authentic social-relations, becomes normalized and totalized. Within this sociopolitical space of catastrophism, the horizon of death ominously looms as the only possible outcome of late-capitalism’s destructive impulses. Paradoxically, death itself becomes the final ontological obstacle that late-capitalism attempts to overcome through the complete codification, delineation, and dominance of this last “othered” existential space. Within the rhetoric of catastrophism life and death coalesce, revealing that life within late-capitalism’s era of the “authoritarian commodity” is death itself, and the individuals experiencing

this existence as the living-dead lack any traces of authentic life.

In “Land of the Living Dead: Capitalism and the Catastrophes of Everyday Life,” David McNally argues that the “earliest modern images of the zombie are tied to figures of mindless labor.”¹⁵⁶ He goes on to claim that

this image carried a latent but powerful social criticism: the idea that in capitalist society the majority become nothing but bearers of undifferentiated life energies, dispensed in units of abstract time. The *raison d'être* of zombies is the labor they perform.¹⁵⁷

This reduction of lived-experience to abstract labor potential informs the figurative death of such individuals within late-capitalism. They are dead because their life has no meaning beyond their exchange-value, which is already metaphorically removed from use-value.

McNally argues that as cultural forms, there are two dominant representations of the zombie that are explicitly tied to the development of neoliberalism—those of “crazed con-

156 McNally, David. “Land of the Living Dead: Capitalism and the Catastrophes of Everyday Life.” *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*. Ed. Sasha Lilley. 2012. 115

157 *ibid*, 116

sumers and lifeless laborers.”¹⁵⁸ He argues that the older representations of the zombie, specifically those that trace their lineage from Haitian lore by way of the Western Congo, did not involve the cannibalism that is all but ubiquitous in “Western” representations of the zombie. McNally traces this development to the rise of consumer-culture in the 1960s in the United States, and argues that it is not until this historical context that zombies begin to mindlessly crave the flesh of the living. There is something inherently self-negating in the ever-increasing lust for the consumption of living flesh in the cannibalistic zombie trope of American/European cultural production, as consumption and scarcity differentiates it from the colonial form of the “lifeless laborer” zombie trope that McNally argues is still prevalent in African cultural forms. The cannibalistic consumer zombie encounters problems of scarcity for if it cannot consume living flesh it will cease to exist. This problem of scarcity mirrors the ecological concerns of resource allocation, procurement, and sustainability so prevalent in late-capitalist discourses of catastrophe. Thus, in the same way that the logic of late-capitalism creates an ir-

158 *ibid*, 117

reconcilable schism between the realities of consumption in a finite physical world and the theoretical impulses which underlie late-capitalism's quest for profit accumulation, so too does the cannibalistic consumer zombie embody the contradiction of its need to consume more living-flesh and the scarcity that manifests as the direct result of such consumption.

McNally hints at the possibility inherent within such cultural renderings of the zombie as a figure that evokes catastrophic anxieties. He argues that

the clash of the manic flesh-eater and the laboring-drone also hints at another startling zombie capacity: rebellion.¹⁵⁹

While his analysis of the emergence of the two types of zombie cultural forms, the cannibalistic consumer zombie of "developed" countries and the mindless-laborer slave zombie of "developing" countries is compelling, his depiction of "the truly subversive image of the zombie revolt" is prosaically emblematic of past utopian visions. He uses zombie rebellion as a metaphor for the "everyday work of resistance," arguing that

revolution grows out of ordinary, prosaic acts of organizing and resistance whose

159 *ibid*, 123

coalescence produces mass upheaval.¹⁶⁰

In critiquing the catastrophic opposition to his prescriptive perspective on revolutionary politics, McNally argues that the other

apocalyptic scenario, in which a complete collapse of social organization ushers in a tumultuous upheaval, is ultimately a mystical rather than political one.¹⁶¹

This dismissal of the mystical, of the messianic, in favor of a purely political rendering of revolt falls into the reductive trap of affirming a counter-logic to capitalism within a social space that is already completely contained, delineated, and dominated by late-capitalism, a space with no ontological outside.

McNally fails to acknowledge that in the figurative-representational space of the zombie, the only act that can negate the cyclical violence of the zombie's consumption (and by extension the logic of late-capitalism) is the self-negation of the zombie by its own nihilistic consumption, which inevitably leads to absolute scarcity and the impossibility of its own continued sustenance. McNally misconstrues Marx when he argues that

160 *ibid*, 123

161 *ibid*, 124

just as, to paraphrase Marx, the working class must negate its own alienated condition if it is to emancipate itself, so zombie rebels must *de-zombify* themselves and acquire consciousness and identity in the process of overturning their degraded state.¹⁶²

The consumer-zombie already contains within itself the inevitability of its own destruction, and further, its own transcendence. It possesses this potentiality for self-negation precisely because through the mindless act of sustaining itself it encounters the limits of scarcity and causes its own destruction—the death of the already-dead. To take this cultural form and transpose it onto the dispossessed subjects of late-capitalist domination, is not merely a question of how to “acquire consciousness and identity” but rather an anti-political, mystical embracing of the nothingness latent in the nihilistic contradictions at the core of late-capitalism. This destruction of the nihilism undergirding the contradictions of late-capitalist logic through the adoption of nihilism *itself* as an ethical position is precisely the course that Tiqqun argues for in their essay “Silence and Beyond.”

162 *ibid*, 126

Tiqqun essentially agrees with David McNally in the catastrophic analysis of late-capitalism, yet their response to such a bleak future could not be more divergent. Whereas McNally argues that the zombie/disenfranchised/proletariat subject of late-capitalism must “acquire consciousness and identity,” Tiqqun argues that such an argument fits precisely within the confines of the biopolitical fabric of late-capitalist domination. Tiqqun argues that with the historical development of capitalism, the disciplinary practices of sovereign power where the “tyrannical enemy [...] draws its power from its ability to shut people up” have given way to a form of power (biopower) which expresses

its aptitude to make them talk [...and as a result] has moved its center of gravity from its mastery of the world itself to its seizure of the world’s mode of disclosure.¹⁶³

Thus, McNally’s claim that in order to effectively challenge late-capitalism all one has to do is analyze its

mystified social relations [...as a means to] disclose what they tell us about the genu-

163 Tiqqun. “Silence and Beyond.” *Tiqqun: Conscious Organ of the Imaginary Party* #1. 2011. 70

inely monstrous, deadening, and zombifying processes to which wage-laborers are subjected in modern society,¹⁶⁴

fails to acknowledge that such modes of disclosure are *already* codified according to the very logic of late-capitalism itself. Tiqqun argues that through the domination of biopower as the delimiting power dynamic concomitant with the rise of post-industrial late-capitalism, all attempts to speak to or disclose “truth” within it merely serve late-capitalism’s primacy.

Tiqqun is writing from the temporal position of Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history,” a position contextualized by the failures of social-democratic reform, the communist state, and the new left—all impotently opposed to the supposed totalizing triumph of capitalism. Within this quasi-fatalism, Tiqqun argues that

even contestation [against capitalism] proves daily how incapable it has been of supporting itself on that modernization’s uninterrupted avalanche of defeats.¹⁶⁵

Tiqqun argues that such antagonistic contestation has failed precisely because such challenges have attempted to engage late-capitalism using

164 op cit, “Land of the Living Dead”, 127

165 op cit, “Silence and Beyond” 70

its own modes of disclosure and recognition. Tiqqun claims that the hypermediated discourse of late-capitalism

only recognizes as a truly existent opposition the opposition that *is willing to speak*; that is, to speak its language, and hence to subscribe to the alienation of the Common¹⁶⁶

Here contestation takes on a meta-linguistic component, in that through biopower's coercive institutional apparatuses, any contestation without the language of political demands has been relegated to the impractical, insane, and anarchic. Tiqqun elucidates the need to confront the metaphysical nothingness underneath the veneer of Real late-capitalist social relations with a negating form of nothingness that is conscious of itself as such. For, as they claim

[...] the real hostility, the metaphysical hostility, which allows neither language nor the moment it will express itself to be controlled, and which moreover prefers silence to any speech, has been pushed back into the shadows of what does not appear and hence does not exist¹⁶⁷

166 *ibid*, 71

167 *ibid*, 71

According to Tiqqun, the project for the antagonist against capitalism must simply be affirmative negation, *without* any prescriptive qualifiers positively arguing for something to take the place of capitalism (such as state-socialism, alter-globalization, green or sustainable social-democratic welfare-states, etc).

Tiqqun state clearly that they believe “all ‘social struggles’ are ridiculous”¹⁶⁸ because “they are merely serving what they think they’re challenging.”¹⁶⁹ Within such a perspective, a conscious and active nihilism begins to align itself as, to borrow from Engels by way of Hegel, the negation of the negation. This is an active nihilism, conscious of its own power to destroy the passive nihilism latent within late-capitalism’s own contradictory nature. Tiqqun writes: “Capitalism produces the *conditions* for its transcendence, not that transcendence itself.”¹⁷⁰ Thus, paradoxically, Tiqqun at once embraces and eschews the collapsist rhetoric of late-capitalist catastrophism. Within the late-capitalist contradiction between the theoretical impulse to maximize profit amidst the reality of

168 *ibid*, 72

169 *ibid*, 71

170 *ibid*, 70

finite resource scarcity, are the conditions for capitalism's transcendence. Yet Tiqqun seems to be saying that if such conditions are not met with a conscious ethical force that is aware of its potential to hasten the destruction of capitalist relations, then the passive nihilism within late-capitalism will have run its course—resulting in something akin to a series of ecological, social, and political collapses. Thus, Tiqqun claims that “among those we encounter, we appreciate nothing more than such cold resolution to ruining this world.”¹⁷¹

Tiqqun's active nihilism in “Silence and Beyond” is both an unwilled reaction to the totalizing encroachment of late-capitalist social relations and an ethical position that they consciously possess. Because of this schizoid anti-political position, Tiqqun's active negation of the meta-physical nature underlying late-capitalism as “the way for crossing the line, the way towards the exit from nihilism [...and the way] beyond it,”¹⁷² is inherently ontological and existential, akin to Georges Bataille's conception of death.

For Bataille, there is a certain existential wholeness outside of the limits that death im-

171 *ibid*, 70

172 *ibid*, 74

poses on life. Bataille scholar Michael Richardson claims that

Bataille's sensibility is essentially tragic: he refused to accept any possibility of an escape from the human condition. In the end we are condemned to death, and to the annihilation of our being. Indeed, far from striving against this condition, he believed we should accept it. Tragic it may be, but it remained the only truth of our existence.¹⁷³

At face value this essentially pessimistic view of life seems starkly opposed to the potentiality of transcendence that Tiquun posits, yet both Bataille and Tiquun are speaking to beings ultimate negation of itself.

Bataille's ontological whole that exists apart from life, in death, is quite similar to Tiquun's messianic conception of the communism that manifests in the active negation of capitalism in its entirety. For Tiquun, communism is irreducibly rooted in the *becoming-of-negation*, the communality emerging when the predicative identities, individual subjects, values, and moralities beholden to the simulacra of

173 Richardson, Michael. *Georges Bataille Essential Writings*. 1998.
202

late-capitalism are stripped away—leaving “only a *total, existential hostility*.”¹⁷⁴ This destruction of predicative, simulated ontologies “*by removing them from their temporal element*, strips nude the truth of our times.”¹⁷⁵ This destruction, the active nihilism aligned against late-capitalist domination (passive nihilism), informs the journal’s very name, as they claim:

In the Sabbatean tradition the moment of the general destruction of things was given the name *Tiqqun*. In that instant, each thing is repaired and removed from the long chain of suffering it underwent in this world.¹⁷⁶

This is similar to Bataille’s views on the emergence of cognizant life as a finite interruption of the pure continuity of infinite existence. Thus, death acts as *both* the moment of repairing the separation of life from death by reintegrating dead-life back into the infinite totality of death, and as being the *totality of death itself*. For Bataille, death is at once a singular moment (an act), as well as a complete and infinite totality (state of being). In the same way, *Tiqqun*’s advo-

174 *ibid*, 75

175 *ibid*, 73

176 *ibid*, 77

cation for the active destruction of late-capitalism is the singular moment (the act) which repairs and reintegrates forms-of-life into the complete and infinite totality of communism (state of being). This is a destruction of the vestiges of the self *en masse*, done in a communal process of *becoming-nothing-together*.

In “Silence and Beyond” Tiqqun uses Bataille’s work to explain the importance of destroying the present state of things. They quote from Bataille’s *Theory of Religion*:

All the subsistence existence and toil that permitted me to get there were suddenly destroyed, they emptied out infinitely like a river into the ocean of that one infinitesimal moment.¹⁷⁷

Thus death, as the moment of the existential destruction of the self as well as the moment of reintegration with that which is beyond the narrow confines of human life, is a messianic bearer of truth—a tenuous position to hold in the midst of postmodernity. Bataille argues that

death actually discloses the imposture of reality, not only in that the absence of duration gives the lie to it, but above all because death is the great affirmer, the

177 *ibid*, 77

wonder-struck of life [...] Death reveals life in its plenitude and dissolves the real order.¹⁷⁸

This dissolution of “the real order” through death finds its parallel in Tiquun’s contention that whoever has never experienced one of those hours of joyous or melancholic negativity cannot tell how close to destruction the infinite is.¹⁷⁹

Thus the act of destruction, of an active nihilism, hints at the possibility of transcending the falsity of the present and the reintegration with the infinite.

For Tiquun, late-capitalism and all of the affects bound up within its displays of simulacra and biopower must be destroyed to be overcome, much in the same way that death for Bataille forms the basis of the reconnection with the existentially infinite. Bataille writes in *Inner Experience*, that

it is by dying, without possible evasion, that I will perceive the rupture which constitutes my nature and in which I have transcended ‘what exists.’[...] Death is in one sense the common inevitable, but in

178 Bataille, Goerges. *Theory of Religion*. 1992. 46-47

179 op cit. “Silence and Beyond.” 77

another sense profound, inaccessible.¹⁸⁰

Life for Bataille is a rupture that separates and isolates, while death is a rupture that joins and repairs. Similarly, for Tiqqun, freedom comes from first recognizing the death-like finitude presupposed by existing within the confines of late-capitalist power dynamics, and secondly, by attempting to destroy such an ontology. They claim that there are indeed those who are “applying nihilism to nihilism itself,” yet

they still retain, from their prior state, the feeling that they are living as if they were already dead; but from this state of indifference concerning the raw fact of being alive, they draw the formula for the greatest possible sovereignty, a freedom which is incapable of trembling in the face of *anything* anymore...¹⁸¹

Thus, Tiqqun’s program is the abandonment of the very idea of such positive programs, in favor of a negative revolt or insurrection, without demands, silent and invisible. It is a conception of struggle firmly rooted in the metaphysical negation of *everything* in “this enemy world.”¹⁸²

180 Bataille, Georges. *Inner Experience*. 1988. 71-72

181 op cit. “Silence and Beyond.” 76

Tiqqun acknowledges that such beliefs warrant placing “a high importance on the form of the manifestation of negativity that invent a new *active grammar* of contestation.”¹⁸³ Central to this “new active grammar” of negativity is an evasion of language’s imposition of meaning. Tiqqun argues that all previous social movements aligned against late-capitalism have made the mistake of attempting to speak to late-capitalist domination on its own terms, entering a discourse in which all of the language is already effectively controlled. They argue that “*the greatest possible demands don’t allow themselves to be formulated*,”¹⁸⁴ and in so doing they create an antagonistic position that, through its own inarticulation, evades late-capitalist propensity to impose meaning and exert control over what is being signified. Tiqqun claims that between the passive nihilism inherent in the contradictions of capitalism as first outlined by Marx, and the active nihilism which seeks to destroy all that exists within the late-capitalist ontology is “*the line*. And that line is the unspeakable, which imposes silence.”¹⁸⁵ This line, the

182 *ibid*, 77

183 *ibid*, 72

184 *ibid*, 76

demarcation between real/simulacra, life/death, capitalism/communism, must be shrouded in silence, what actively negates all that exists must necessarily be complete and total absence, existence's lack, the void that threatens to assert itself and in so doing to rejoin the interruption of life, in Bataille's terms, to the infinite nature of death. Thus, the lack of language and the signification or imposition of meaning that accompanies it manifests itself as a negative ethical hostility which is existentially "the unspeakable."¹⁸⁶

Tiqun's argument for silence, a radical negation of all that exists without the prescriptive expression of utopian fantasies, is markedly different from the silence/voicelessness that typifies the cultural trope of the zombie. David McNally's zombies are reduced to the living-dead; they are stripped of both language and existence. They mirror a late-capitalist ontology that embodies the *complete* expenditure of human labor-power for the production of exchange-values. Ironically, the only creature capable of existing *purely* as limitless *human* labor power is precisely the figure of the *non-human*. With his metaphor of the zombie as the

185 *ibid*, 76

186 *ibid*, 75

dispossessed worker/consumer of late-capitalism, McNally argues the zombie's voicelessness and lack of language is an expression of its oppression. Thus for McNally, the zombie and, by extension, the late-capitalist proletariat, merely needs an "awakening to consciousness" to turn "the world upside down."¹⁸⁷

Tiqqun's opposes this view of silence, preferring the conscious silence of a nihilism aligned against late-capitalist domination. They argue that silence is an offensive position that does not allow struggle or resistance to enter into the language and logic of late-capitalism. By disavowing the articulation of resistance to late-capitalism's political, social, or economic demands, Tiqqun's silent antagonism evades the trap of language and the imposition of meaning that accompanies it. The resulting rejection of demands and conscious silence appear very similar to Georges Bataille's theoretical conception of death. For Bataille death is the transcendent moment in which the interruption of life is finally reintegrated with the infinite. This parallels Tiqqun's own communist transcendence, as they claim that only a conscious nihilism can transcend the totality of late-

187 op cit, "Land of the Living Dead," 123

capitalist relations. They write that

*we cannot transcend nihilism without realizing it, nor realize it without transcending it. Crossing the line means the general destruction of things as such, or in other words the annihilation of nothingness.*¹⁸⁸

Therefore, any sociopolitical model that exists alongside capitalism posturing as an alternative to it is still within capitalism's totalizing realm of being. Only capitalism's complete destruction can usher in a post-capitalist alterity. To annihilate the nothingness is the realization of a metaphysical negation of a negation. According to Tiqqun it is only through such an act of Batailllean death that communism can be realized.

188 op cit, "Silence and Beyond," 77

The Poetics of Alienation: Gaston Bachelard's "The Dialectics of Outside and Inside" and Tiqqun's *Theory of Bloom*

In "The Dialectics of Outside and Inside," Gaston Bachelard challenges the boundaries of ontology in favor of a more ambiguous rendering of being. In Bachelard's conception of being, spatiality coalesces into itself, blurring the distinction between inside and outside. Thus, what is presented as a metaphysical inquiry into the nature of spatiality expands into an exercise in ontology. Bachelard claims that "philosophers, when confronted with outside and inside, think in terms of being and non-being."¹⁸⁹ (Bachelard 212). Bachelard's complication of the dynamic between being and non-being, which challenges the reductive notion that these two ontological positions are distinct from and opposed to one another, reflects how Tiqqun underscores the

189 Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. 212

fundamental unit of being within late-capitalist power relations: the figure of the Bloom.

In *Theory of Bloom*, Tiqqun constructs this figure of the Bloom as that which supplants the worker or proletariat in traditional Marxist analyses of class struggle. They argue that the terrain of capitalism has changed, which perforce changes the temporal/metaphysical notion of late-capitalism as the contemporary stage of capitalist development, and therefore as well the idea of what constitutes the revolutionary subject changes. The figure of the Bloom, appropriated from Leopold Bloom (James Joyce's disaffected protagonist of *Ulysses*) is not merely the new figure of being within late-capitalism, but at once the dissolution of the very notion of the revolutionary subject and the embodiment of a subject completely possessed by its own lack of being. Just as Bachelard problematizes the dichotomy of non-being and being, the Bloom represents the coalescence of these two positionalities into a singular form-of-life.

Tiqqun's treatment of the Bloom paradoxically becomes the *reason for* and the *manifestation of* the estrangement from existence prevalent in late-capitalist society. Bloom is a

figure of loss, the last manifestation of life within the last stage of history. It is an ontological figure existing within a context where all political, metaphysical, social, and spatial planes are already commodified totalities that offer no way out. In this conception of late-capitalist space the outside is now completely internalized. Tiqqun claims that

in this empire of ruins in perpetual renovation, there is no refuge to be had anywhere, and we no longer even have the recourse of an interior desertion, within ourselves.¹⁹⁰

This ontological space, in which the complete coalescence of being and non-being forms a strange semblance of totality, complicates any authentic understanding of self. According to Tiqqun, because of this conflation between outside and inside, forms-of-life under late-capitalism no longer can seek any external refuge from late-capitalism's pervasive domination. In addition, and perhaps more harrowing, not even "an interior desertion" into the self provides refuge, for internally the figure of the Bloom is simply the same abject nothingness of externalized late-capitalist relations. Thus, Tiqqun's figure of the

190 Tiqqun. *Theory of Bloom*. 2012. 20

Bloom expresses the “invertible dynamisms”¹⁹¹ of Bachelard’s complication of the inside/outside dialectic.

Bachelard writes that in such an ontological spatiality in which

one no longer knows right away whether one is running toward the center or escaping [...] The being of man is an unsettled being which all expression unsettles.¹⁹²

While there is a fundamental sympathy here between Bachelard and Tiqqun’s treatments of being, Bachelard’s conception of such “unsettled being” is tinged with a certain finitude to the way in which being *has always* been; whereas Tiqqun’s conception of being is clearly situated *within* history, as a metaphysical result of capitalist development. Bachelard points to the impossibility of a closed conception of outside-being and inside-being by arguing that

being does not see itself [...] It does not stand out, it is not *bordered* by nothingness: one is never sure of finding it, or of finding it solid, when one approaches a center of being. And if we want to determine man’s being, we are never sure of being closer to

191 *ibid*, 214

192 *ibid*, 214

ourselves if we ‘withdraw’ into ourselves.¹⁹³ Thus, Bachelard complicates the idea that being can be found in an analysis of pure exteriority or withdrawn interiority. Instead, he draws attention to how conceptions of being cannot be hypostatized in static, clearly delineated methods. There is a certain permeability in Bachelard’s conception of inside and outside and its relation to being. His emphasis on being as “not *bordered* by nothingness”¹⁹⁴ suggests that being is the same thing as non-being; both are conflated, transgressing the ostensible boundaries between being and non-being, to paint one another in mimetic relief.

Tiqqun also dissolves the delineation between being and non-being, yet they are much less neutral on this polemical point. Tiqqun claims that Bloom is not merely “alienated man” (in the orthodox Marxist sense of alienation), but rather,

Bloom is the man who has become so thoroughly conjoined with his alienation that it would be absurd to try to separate them.¹⁹⁵

193 *ibid*, 215

194 *ibid*, 215

195 *op cit*, *Theory of Bloom*, 20

Thus, for Tiquun, Bloom is the figure which affirmatively *lives its own nothingness*—it is the being of non-being itself. These figures so fully ingrained in their own alienation form the basis of life under late-capitalist domination, as well as the affective ties that reify late-capitalism's dominance. It is important then not to view Bloom as a figure purely framed as a subtraction, as an ontological subject that lacks being simply because of externalized domination. Instead, Bloom is the figure, which through its own totalizing alienation and disaffection actively implicates itself within the rhizomatic web of late-capitalist power relations.

There is something *active* about Bloom's own destitution. Thus, whereas Bachelard is only willing to state that being is “not *bordered* by nothingness,”¹⁹⁶ and thus indirectly point to the evocative nothingness latent within being itself, Tiquun is explicitly adamant in depicting us, as Bloom, as the figures that

wherever we go, we carry inside us the desert whose hermit we are. And if on certain days we can swear that we are ‘the whole universe’ [...] it's because we see in everything only the Nothing that

196 op cit, *The Poetics of Space*, 215

we ourselves so fully are.¹⁹⁷

Here is the Bachelardian dissolution of the separation between inside and outside, yet through Tiqqun's disavowal it takes on a much more sinister tone. The socio-spatial landscape upon which Bloom exists in its abject nothingness thus becomes the real; as such it is not the recognition of the loss of being, but rather the total supplanting of the nothing as the real. It is an affirmative negativity which forms the historical emergence of Bloom, and in this way "that Nothingness is the absolutely real before which all that exists becomes ghostly."¹⁹⁸

After establishing the historical, political, and metaphysical contexts of the figure of the Bloom, Tiqqun analyzes the social space (or perhaps non-social space is more appropriate) that is Bloom's habitat, but is also a terrain that is radically altered by Bloom's affirmative negativity. Paradoxically, as alienated as he or she is, the Bloom does not exist in isolation—it is only Bloom when the estrangement of the insular singularity of Bloom is compounded across a multitude of disaffected Blooms. This space,

197 op cit, *Theory of Bloom*, 21

198 ibid, 21

that which exists only as a result of a “Bloomification” of society and, paradoxically, as the only habitat capable of furthering this “Bloomification,” is the metropolis.

The Bachelardian dialectics of inside and outside become complicated in Tiquun’s analysis of Bloom precisely when they try to locate Bloom within its most prevalent habitat, the metropolis. Tiquun claims that

Bloom is rather *the rootless man*, the man who has adopted the feeling of being at home in exile, who has rooted himself in placelessness, and for whom uprooting no longer evokes banishment, but on the contrary an ordinary situation.¹⁹⁹

This notion of “being at home in exile” is the coalescence of outside into the inside, the amalgamation and containment of the antagonisms between these metaphysical positionalities. The fact that this reconciliation of antimonies is contained within the feeling of Bloom personalizes the immediacy of such experience; spread across a multitude of Blooms such paradoxical affirmation-through-disposition when externalized becomes an “ordinary situation.” Bachelard is referring to this when he writes about the in-

199 *ibid*, 45

timate reversal of outside and inside. He argues:
Being is alternately condensation that disperses with a burst, and dispersion that flows back to a center. Outside and inside are both intimate—they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility.²⁰⁰

In this way, Bloom can fully internalize the external feeling of exile, that it can be made ordinary, and become the very base upon which Bloom's conception of self is rooted—its own "placelessness." Thus the outside, and all of its concomitant alienation, can transgress upon the boundaries of the self/inside and become the totality of inside-being itself.

This internalization of exteriority finds its most ardent spatial representation in late-capitalism as the metropolis. Tiqqun argues that on the global scale, the most insane and at the same time the most characteristic concretion of the Spectacle's *ethos* remains the metropolis.²⁰¹

It is in this way that the metropolis becomes a totalizing space, the end of expansive spatiality as a result of late-capitalist development. It is a spatial construct that contains *everything* within

200 op cit, *The Poetics of Space*, 218

201 op cit, *Theory of Bloom*, 47

it; it is the spatial equivalent of the totality of late-capitalism's apparatuses of domination. Tiqqun argues that

[...] the metropolis itself has *no outside*: the territories that its metastatic spread does not occupy are still polarized by it; that is, they are determined *in all their aspects* by its absence.²⁰²

By arguing that the metropolis has “no outside” Tiqqun is drawing attention to the pervasiveness of the spatiality which is at once a symptom of the proliferation of Blooms and the cause of such proliferation. Even places within the geopolitical fabric that are not urban metropolises only make sense as that which is *not* the metropolis, or as Tiqqun puts it, “they are determined *in all their aspects* by its absence [as metropolis].”²⁰³

As the metropolis becomes the spatiality that contains Blooms as well as the collectivized product of alienation-from-self that the Blooms embody, it follows that the metropolis is typified by loss. Tiqqun posits that “the dominant trait of the spectacular-metropolitan *ethos* is *the loss of*

202 *ibid*, 47

203 *ibid*, 47

experience [...]”²⁰⁴ While the space of the metropolis may indeed be typified by the “loss of experience” the figure of the Bloom is one which fully inhabits this loss. Thus, in a paradoxical way, there is something active about Bloom’s alienated being. It is loss framed wholly within the positive, which makes it all the more emblematic of Foucauldian biopower, or the forms of control and domination that allow and foster, rather than limit and destroy.

This affirmative conception of the loss of experience is indicative of the fundamental crisis Bachelard argues is at the root of the dialectics of outside and inside. Tiqqun’s conception of the metropolis becomes the site in which, as Bachelard posits,

[...] we absorb a mixture of being and nothingness. The center of ‘being-there’ wavers and trembles. Intimate space loses its clarity, while exterior space loses its void, void being the raw material of possibility of being. We are banished from the realm of possibility.²⁰⁵

Due to the blurring of the distinction between inside and outside in Tiqqun’s metropolis, the

204 *ibid*, 47

205 *op cit*, *The Poetics of Space*, 218

exterior no longer exists as something concrete outside of the interiority of the self. Thus, the void associated with the exterior, the unknown, no longer expresses its potentiality or possibility. In such a totalizing spatiality as the metropolis, possibility ceases to exist, for every ontological position is already contained within the spatiality of the metropolis. This fundamentally traps the Bloom within the being of its abject loss; it is trapped because it no longer possesses the possibility for something beyond or outside of itself. Tiqqun elaborates on this position by claiming

that Bloom is essentially the metropolis man in no way implies the possibility, through birth or by choice, of escaping this condition [...] ²⁰⁶

Thus, all possibilities of escape from the totalizing space of the metropolis are nullified, and the Bloom therefore becomes the form of being which proverbially *lives-as-loss*.

The metropolis is the space upon which the estrangement of being is spatially mapped. Tiqqun writes of such disaffected space that

within the metropolis, people never experience concrete events, but only conven-

206 op cit, *Theory of Bloom*, 47

tions, rules, and a completely symbolized,
completely constructed second nature.²⁰⁷

Within this affirmative rendering of estrangement it becomes apparent that it is not simply a lack which forms the ontological nature of Bloom's existence within the metropolis. Instead, it is the very conventions, rules, symbols, and construction which create a positivity that is grounded in absence. This is essentially a Bachelardian perspective on the spatiality of the late-capitalist urban metropolis, as it refuses to frame this metropolis as the simple dichotomy between inside and outside, what is and what once was. This binarization is complicated in that Bloom is not merely the alienated individual; it is an alienation so totalizing that living persists despite the loss, so much that the loss takes on affective tonalities of its own which in turn are *lived-as-loss*.

This is the blurring, or indistinction, that exists underneath the rhetoric of the dialectics of outside and inside. In this way Tiqqun's metropolis is a Bachelardian nightmare, a nightmare which, as Bachelard writes,

is simple, because it is radical. It would be intellectualizing the experience if we were

to say that the nightmare is the result of a sudden doubt as to the certainty of inside and the distinctness of the outside.²⁰⁸

Thus, the conflation between inside and outside, between alienation and living-loss is not merely an intellectual recognition of itself as such, but rather an experiential mode of being. Tiqqun evokes this complicated reciprocity of the metropolitan experience as they claim that

what prevails there [in the metropolis] is a radical split between the insignificance of everyday, so-called private, life, where nothing happens, and the transcendence of a congealed history in a so-called public sphere to which no one has access.²⁰⁹

This dynamic, that of the dead private sphere and the inaccessible public sphere, typifies the spatiality of the metropolis, the home of the Bloom. Here the distinction between inside and outside blur into one another to create a generalized state of disaffection.

Bachelard delves into the problematic nature of searching within oneself for the existential delineation of experience. Interestingly, the poetics he analyzes in this context are essen-

208 op cit, *The Poetics of Space*, 218

209 op cit, *Theory of Bloom*, 49

tially the poetics of anguish, and such a poetics can be interpreted as the ontology of the Bloom's metropolis. Reading it through the context of Bachelard, the metropolis is indeed a disaffected nightmare, but because it is so generalized and subsequently normalized, this

nightmare is not visually frightening. The fear does not come from the outside. Nor is it composed of old memories. It has no past, no physiology. Nothing in common, either, with having one's breath taken away. Here fear is being itself. Where can one flee, where can one find refuge? Space is nothing but a 'horrible outside-inside'.²¹⁰

Thus, Bloom is not subject to the orthodox Marxist conception of alienation, as such alienation is completely dependent on the externalization of such root causes. Such alienation also needs the "old memories" of less estranged times to have as a dialectical counterbalance. However, Bloom is the figure that has fully internalized all of its own externalized alienation and thus its ontological space; the metropolis, is in Bachelardian terms "nothing but a 'horrible outside-inside'."²¹¹ This liminality situates such lived-experience as

210 op cit, *The Poetics of Space*, 218

211 ibid, 218

the 'formless-life' of Bloom, with its monochrome and silent thirst for nothingness, [that] yields at many points to indistinction.²¹²

Thus, Tiqqun's conception of the metropolis depends on the fundamental separation expressed by the internal contradictions latent within this space.

The metropolis, like Bloom, is a socio-ontological construction that sees its development as both a symptom and expression of the development of late-capitalism. Tiqqun writes:

The metropolises can be distinguished from all other great human formations by the fact that in them the closest proximity, and often the greatest promiscuity, coincides with the greatest estrangement. People had never been brought together in such large numbers, but neither have they been separated to this degree.²¹³

Here the juxtaposition between the physicality and the metaphysicality of the space of the metropolis calls attention to how the space itself begins to take on the human qualities of dispossession, estrangement, and alienation. In this

212 op cit, *Theory of Bloom*, 49

213 ibid, 50

way, as Bachelard claims, “man’s [sic] being is confronted with the world’s being.”²¹⁴ Thus, in the metropolis, the individual condition informs and, paradoxically, takes on the dispossessed conditions of the collective.

It is important to note, as it subsequently forms the basis of their political polemic, that Tiqqun’s evaluation of the metropolis is not simply one of defeated resignation. While they argue that “finitude, solitude, and exposure [...] weave the backdrop of everyone’s existence in the big city,”²¹⁵ it is precisely these markers of Bloom’s experience that allow for a transcendent overcoming of such internalized estrangement. They argue that:

The metropolis appears, moreover, as the chosen ground for mimetic rivalry [...] the more isolated people are, the more they resemble each other; the more they resemble each other, the more they detest themselves; the more they detest themselves, the more they isolate themselves. And where people can no longer recognize one another as participants in building a common world, a chain reaction en-

214 op cit, *The Poetics of Space*, 212

215 op cit, *Theory of Bloom*, 50

sues, a collective fission that everything combines to catalyze.²¹⁶

Paradoxically then, it is Bloom's complete estrangement that lays the foundations for a politics of "real community."²¹⁷ The study of Bloom and its metropolitan habitat is essentially the study of being under late-capitalism. Bachelard argues that "to make a study of being [...] it is preferable to follow all the ontological deviations of the various experiences of being."²¹⁸ Thus, as was already presaged by Bachelard, being has to transcend its propensity to delineate its boundaries in simple binarized form: inside/outside, here/there, being/non-being, etc. As Tiqqun argues, within Bloom lies the latent possibility to effectively challenge all that made Bloom what it is. Within its own disaffection, following its alienation to its most logical point of finality, the possibility of its transcendence is made manifest. Tiqqun gestures toward this transcendence by arguing that

in the manner of Bloom, the metropolis materializes not only the integral loss of community, but at the same time the infi-

216 *ibid*, 51-52

217 *ibid*, 54

218 *op cit*, *The Poetics of Space*, 213

nite *possibility* of its recovery.²¹⁹

Both Gaston Bachelard and Tiqqun use poetry to accentuate and contextualize the theoretical nature of their works. Bachelard is much more conscious about using poetry as an object of analysis, a separate form of aesthetic expression which provides insight into metaphysical realities. In *Theory of Bloom* Tiqqun uses fragments of poetry and literature, but these are never the explicit object of analysis and instead retain an abstracted quality, adding subtle implied resonances to their theoretical work. In an odd way, Bachelard seems intent on describing the metaphysical state where the dialectics of outside and inside coalesce into one another and he analyzes such poetic instances to support his theoretical assertions, while Tiqqun, interested in transcending the figure of the Bloom and the socio-political context of late-capitalism, is content to allow the poetic fragments to exist without detailed explication. While both Bachelard and Tiqqun draw from a wide array of philosophical, literary, and poetic sources to supplement their arguments, it is significant that both refer to the Belgian-born French poet Henri Michaux to evoke their respective theoretical premises.

219 op cit, *Theory of Bloom*, 55

As a poetic voice exploring alienation amid the 20th century ontological crises, Michaux's poetry provides an intimate aesthetic rendering of Bachelard's complication of inside and outside as well as the lived-loss of Tiqqun's Bloom. Bachelard uses Henri Michaux's short prose-poem "Shade-Haunted Space" (*L'espace aux ombres*) to explore the loss of "being-there" (*Être-là*). This is the same existential loss that typifies Tiqqun's figure of the Bloom, yet, whereas for Bachelard and perhaps Michaux this loss is framed purely in a negative or reductive sense, Tiqqun claims that because Bloom is living this loss of "being-there" it is affirming alienated life-itself. In "Shade-Haunted Space" Michaux writes: "Space, but you cannot even conceive the horrible inside-outside that real space is."²²⁰ Space is blurred and lacks the delineation that is a surrogate for order. Bachelard claims that such a space, a place mired in the indistinguishability of "inside-outside," is actually a hell where "being is slowly digesting its nothingness."²²¹ This language is telling, as biological digestion is a breaking-down (destruction), yet it is done with the express intent to sustain life (affirmation). Yet

220 op cit, *The Poetics of Space*, 217

221 ibid, 217

here, in his analysis of Michaux's poem, Bachelard is claiming that such a "shade" of being is attempting to sustain itself on absolute "nothingness." This persistence in living when already metaphysically dead, of sustaining on "nothingness," epitomizes Tiquun's figure of the Bloom and explicitly reveals the way in which Bloom is not simply estranged from him or herself but is instead living a totality of alienation.

In Michaux's poem, the only desire such a "shade" can express in such hellish space is to seek to establish delineation, boundaries, and order to the self, to clearly define the limits of inside and outside. Oddly, what appears through such demarcation is the notion of an established whole, or as Michaux writes, the "effort to 'exist as a single unity'."²²² Such a shade grasping for self-definition sees this hellish world as a fundamental unity—every small, clearly defined unit comprising the totality of it all. Yet according to Michaux, this "being-there," the fundamental security that comes with being definitively rooted in place and space, is a farce and was long ago "destroyed by punishment, [and] it was reduced to a noise, a thunderous noise."²²³ Thus, all that

²²² *ibid*, 217

²²³ *ibid*, 217

now exists in this temporal-space is the ghost or “shade” of the “being-there” that once was. It is the dissolution of “being-there” into the indistinguishable “noise” of it all. The yearning to exist is drowned out amidst the cacophony of other such yearnings tempered by the threat of non-existence itself. In his analysis of Michaux’s poem, Bachelard writes that

this spirit, this shade, this noise of a shade which, the poet tells us, desires its unity, may be heard on the outside without it being possible to be sure that it is inside.²²⁴

This fear expressed by Michaux’s shade is, according to Tiqqun, the anxiety of existence under late-capitalism. It is a desire for unity amidst the reality that no such positive unity actually exists any longer, and instead the only unity; the only communality that exists is that of each Bloom’s own estranged existence. Thus, the psycho-social landscape of late-capitalist relations is merely the communal unity of disaffected alienation.

The Henri Michaux poem that is analyzed in Bachelard’s “The Dialectics of Outside and Inside,” “Shade-Haunted Space,” *merely attempts to describe* the situation of the shade’s

224 *ibid*, 217

existential hell, whereas the poem Tiquun uses *attempts to break free* from such a prison of being. In *Theory of Bloom*, Tiquun reproduces Michaux's poem "Clown" in its entirety. "Clown," as opposed to "Shade-Haunted Space," acknowledges the living-loss of contemporary being, but attempts to explore the possible lines of desertion out of such space. The basis of such a desertion, Bloom's desertion from itself, is the active disavowal of all forms of predicative individual identity. When faced with the realization that at the core of Bloom's being is a fundamental nothingness, then all that can be done to escape such an ontological predicament is to actively embrace nothingness as the pure expression of unbridled potentiality.

In "Clown" Michaux writes

I'll let go of everything that seemed to be
indissolubly close. I'll slice it off, I'll over-
turn it, I'll break it, bring it crashing
down.²²⁵

Here, the desire to maintain the edifice of the self, of Bachelard's "being-there," is precisely what keeps Bloom attuned to its own alienation. To break away from such estrangement Bloom must actively reject its own conception of indi-

225 op cit, *Theory of Bloom*, 83

vidual identity, for as Tiqqun claims, “in all that he is, Bloom is outside of himself.”²²⁶ Thus, Tiqqun argues that anything that Bloom insists upon as being *inside of himself* or distinctly his own is just a manifestation of the total commodification of life under late-capitalism. Everything that Bloom thinks constitutes his or her fundamental individual identity or individual being is already codified according to externalized late-capitalist power dynamics. This represents Bloom’s most fundamental abstraction from its own being.

This is a Bachelardian complication of inside and outside, and Tiqqun argues that it is qualifiedly a “generalized schizoid state” that all Blooms experience. In this state

everyone now distinguishes between his ‘true self,’ pure and detached from any objectifiable manifestation, and the system of his ‘false self,’ which is social, role-played, constrained, inauthentic.²²⁷

Tiqqun argues that this inside/outside dichotomy is false, because the Bloom as the new ontological figure of existence is so purely “inauthentic” that there is no longer any inherent

226 *ibid*, 82

227 *ibid*, 82

difference between the “true” and the “false” self. Thus, the only action Bloom can take to transcend this ontological trap is to actively defy all form of identity, either self-imposed or externally imposed, because both forms of identity formation are actually the same. Michaux’s “Clown” evokes this necessary transcendence:

Emptied of the abcess [sic] of being some-
one, I’ll drink
once again the nutritive space...
...Through taunts, degradations
(what is degradation?), shattering, empti-
ness, a total
dissipation-derision-purgation,
I will rid myself of the form that was
thought to be so firmly attached, composed,
coordinated, adapted to my surroundings
and to my associates, so worth, so worthy,
my associates.²²⁸

This “nutritive space” that emerges when one no longer feels the need to be someone is the expression of limitless potentiality, and it is in stark opposition to the complete identity and resultant stagnation of Bloom. Here the transcendence of late-capitalist socio-

228 *ibid*, 83-85

political realities becomes an inherently ontological act, for through ridding the self “of the form that was thought to be so firmly attached, composed, [and] coordinated” to the world around it, the self is confronted with pure affirmative negativity—all the potential that appears infinite within the complete emptiness that exists. Just as the “worker/proletariat” was once the revolutionary subject, Bloom paradoxically becomes both the embodiment of late-capitalism’s unquestioned dominance and the very ontological vehicle that will transcend it.

In dialectical opposition to Bloom, Tiqqun posits their own namesake, *tiqqun*. They claim that

tiqqun is the only adequate conception of revolution. Not the revolution that *must be* waited for, and even less the one that *can be* prepared for, but the one that develops to its own imperceptible beat within a temporality that’s internal to history.²²⁹

This concept of revolution, the complete transcendence of the present, is totalizing and when viewed through Bachelard’s complication of “the dialectics of outside and inside” it takes on messianic undertones. The notion of *tiqqun*

229 *ibid*, 102

complicates the dichotomy of inside and outside because Bloom is both the ontological product of late-capitalism and the figure of its transcendence. Thus, in a paradoxical way Bloom already contains *tiqqun* within it. Bloom contains the seeds for its own self-destruction and eventual transcendence.

Bloom is the last being within the last stage of capitalist development. Bloom's existence prefigures a total nihilism, and thus Bloom's only option, according to Tiqqun, is "to open the way out of nihilism or perish."²³⁰ In this way Bloom's position, that of forming "part of tiqqun,"²³¹ is a "denegation," a term Bachelard borrows from the French philosopher Jean Hyppolite. Bachelard claims that this concept is "quite different from the simple structure of negation"²³² and, according to Hyppolite's reading of Freud's *Verneinung*, as recounted by Jacques Lacan,

the repressed is intellectually accepted by the subject, since it is named, and at the same time is negated because the subject refuses to recognize it as his, refuses to recognize him in it.

230 *ibid*, 102

231 *ibid*, 102

232 *op cit*, *The Poetics of Space*, 212

Here, in the same way Bloom refuses to recognize his or her own potential for *tiqqun*, the possession of “the real movement which destroys the present state of things.”²³³ If Bloom represents the affirmative living of an internalized nothingness which merely mirrors the external nothingness of late-capitalist society, then the notion of *tiqqun* as a denegation actually entails engaging in the very act that Bachelard says is complicated by the “myth of outside and inside.”²³⁴ It is the act of definition, delineation, and demarcation through ontological desertion and destruction.

In a social landscape typified by the blurring together of inside and outside, where the schizoid nature of meaning is presupposed but never as it seems, Tiqqun argues that to overcome Bloom the dialectics of outside and inside must be reappropriated and defiantly reasserted. This is where Gaston Bachelard and Tiqqun have their greatest theoretical divergence, for Bachelard seems to be comfortable in merely calling attention to the “myth of outside and inside” whereas Tiqqun argues that such a confluence between the internal and external epitomizes the ontological trap Bloom must ulti-

233 op cit, *Theory of Bloom*, 102

234 op cit, *The Poetics of Space*, 212

mately overcome. Against the backdrop of post-modernity, it may seem antiquated to suggest that one must define the boundaries of meaning, but when faced with the abject nihilism that Bloom represents, such definition becomes a radical alterity. Tiqqun claims:

But the world we're awakening to is a world at war whose brilliance radiates entirely from the trenchant truth of its division into friends and enemies. Designating the front is preliminary to crossing the line, but only combat can accomplish the crossing.²³⁵

Thus, for Tiqqun, the establishment of a temporally new inside and outside forms the first step of overcoming nihilism. Bloom therefore cannot excise the nihilism within him if it is viewed as a totality; the definition and distinction of nihilism as a part of his being must be identified before it can be removed. This is the recognition that nihilism and its denegation are both contained within this fundamental tonality of being, and as Bachelard claims: "We seek to determine being and, in so doing, transcend all situations, to give a situation of all situations."²³⁶

235 op cit, *Theory of Bloom*, 132

236 op cit, *The Poetics of Space*, 212

Such meaning-making determines a new form of ontology, one that transcends both Bloom and its internalized logic of late-capitalism—the emergence of *tiqqun* as the “real movement that destroys the present state of things.”²³⁷

²³⁷ op cit, *Theory of Bloom*, 102

The Politics of Transcending Traditional Metaphysics: A Heideggerian Reading of Tiqqun's "What is Critical Metaphysics?"

In an essay entitled "What is Critical Metaphysics?" from the first *Tiqqun* journal (1999), Tiqqun presents a critique of conventional metaphysics that is heavily indebted to Martin Heidegger's critiques of metaphysics, while it simultaneously tries to move beyond this explicit theoretical influence. "What is Critical Metaphysics?" shows that Tiqqun's project is essentially an attempt to reconcile being with Being in a purely Heideggerian sense. While there are obvious similarities to Heidegger's thought in Tiqqun's essay, including the title's acknowledgment of "What is Metaphysics?", Heidegger's famous 1929 lecture at the University of Freiburg, there are enough theoretical divergences to constitute a decisive shift beyond the limits of a purely Heideggerian critique of metaphysics. Whereas

Heidegger speaks of Dasein as the being which is thinking of its own relation to Being or the being which stands in the “clearing” and is “apprehended by Being,” Tiqqun argues that the mode of disclosure which exposes the false metaphysics of capitalist reality (what they term “commodity modernity”) as a fabrication is inherently a political act. In their argument, Tiqqun elucidates the ontological conditions of existence within commodity modernity. They then discuss—and here the similarities to Heidegger abound—how the “forgetting of Being” has taken hold and produced a nihilistic metaphysics of late-capitalism. Finally, for Tiqqun, positing a way out of the inherent nihilism of commodity modernity results in an exposition of the role of thinking (as an ontological act) and language (Heidegger’s “house of Being”) as ways to transcend late-capitalist commodity modernity into the realization of Being itself. While Tiqqun’s “What is Critical Metaphysics?” relies heavily on Heidegger, they ultimately arrive at a reading critical of Heidegger, one that argues that the ontological terrain has changed within late-capitalist commodity modernity and thus a being-in-the-world is not standing in the clearing of Being because the “world” is a simula-

crum which must be concurrently destroyed and transcended by what they term “critical metaphysics”: the only means to a reconciliation with and realization of Being.

At the center of Tiquun’s critique is the idea that all contemporary metaphysics is conceived within what they term commodity modernity. This socio-political episteme is the result of the same rationalist discourses that started with Plato and became hegemonic during the Enlightenment. Tiquun claims that

modernity has never existed [...] it has finally appeared as what it always was—just a verbal fetish that the superstition of shit-heads and simple spirits, ever since the supposed ‘Renaissance,’ have decorated the progressive rise of commodity relations to a state of social hegemony with.²³⁸

“Commodity relations” here become the complete realization of Marx’s commodity fetishism. This argument is similar to Heidegger’s critique of the metaphysics of subjectivity in that he problematizes the premise on which such a metaphysics rests, namely starting with the individual subject as a being who experiences and

238 Tiquun. “What is Critical Metaphysics” *Tiquun: Conscious Organ of the Imaginary Party* #1. 2011. 6

interacts with other beings (now made into objects)—all while ignoring the more fundamental question of Being itself. Similarly, for Tiqqun commodity modernity and the metaphysics of late-capitalism all rest upon an ontology tempered by the idea that *subjective* abstractions of (economic) value are crystalized into physical forms that have a corresponding *objective* value. Commodity fetishism here obscures the human relations behind the more abstracted relations amongst commodity-forms. Tiqqun writes that

in the same way as commodity relations never really existed as such, ie, as commodity relations, but only as relations between men mutilated into relations between things, everything that is said to be, believed to be, or held up as being ‘modern’ has never really existed as *modern*.²³⁹

Thus, whether it is called post-Fordism, post-industrial late-capitalism, or Empire (a term taken from Toni Negri and Michael Hardt, used by Tiqqun in this and other works), commodity modernity becomes the social, cultural, economic, political, and most importantly for the purposes of this essay, metaphysical paradigm in which beings find themselves.

239 *ibid*, 6

The world of commodity modernity produces a metaphysics of negation. This metaphysics posits the reality and eternality of commodity relations, and denies that there are indeed obfuscated human relations abstracted in the commodity-form. It is essentially a project of denial in so far as

it is the negation of what makes sense of the world, of the imperceptible appearing within the perceptible.²⁴⁰

Abstract economic value is the imperceptible that in commodity modernity becomes imbued within the perceptible form of the commodity itself. Tiqqun adopts Marx's position that such commodity relations are ultimately illusory and through their proliferation and totalization,

this fine project is wholly contained within the aberrant but *effective* illusion that a complete separation between the physical and the metaphysical is possible—a fallacy most often taking form as the underlying reality behind the physical reality.²⁴¹

Thus, Tiqqun introduces a metaphysical element to Marx's commodity fetishism. They argue that any ontology that conflates the imper-

240 *ibid*, 7

241 *ibid*, 7

ceptible and the perceptible is one that cannot address questions of Being, and thus, can only speak to the relations between subjects to objects, ie the relations between *things as things*. Thus, Tiqqun claims that commodity modernity's complementary metaphysics is one of negation, for in contrast to what traditional metaphysics believes it is doing (here Tiqqun is in line with Heideggerian thought) it is actually doing "just the opposite of what it thought it was, in a word: the complete de-realization of the world."²⁴²

Both Heidegger and (arguably) Tiqqun claim that what is at stake in the re-evaluation and critique of conventional metaphysics is re-asserting the "relation of Being to the essence of man."²⁴³ In his "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger argues that through the systemization and institutionalization of metaphysics as a philosophical practice, a system of inquiry has emerged which forgets what he views as the most fundamental question: the "question of Being."²⁴⁴ It is this forgetting that Heidegger addresses when he claims that

242 *ibid*, 7

243 Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism." *Basic Writings*. 1977. 217

244 *ibid*, 234

forgetting the truth of Being in favor of the pressing throng of beings unthought in their essence is what ensnarement [*verfallen*] means in *Being and Time*.²⁴⁵

This “*verfallen*,” usually translated as “falling” or “lapsing,” is when a being loses “itself in the present, forgetting what is most its own [ie Being].”²⁴⁶ This losing itself in the present is what Heidegger calls “*Uneigentlichkeit*” or “inauthenticity” in *Being and Time*. As opposed to inauthenticity, Heidegger posits the opposing condition of existence, the existence of Dasein, as “*die Eigentlichkeit*” or “authentic.” Heidegger scholar William Blattner translates this concept as “ownedness,”

because the phenomenon Heidegger is trying to capture with this language is not a matter of being true to anything, but rather of owning who and how one is.²⁴⁷

Understanding the forgetting of being is absolutely essential as a prerequisite conceptual step to recovering the fundamental relationship to Being.

In “What is Critical Metaphysics?” Tiqqun argues that life under late-capitalist

245 *ibid*, 235

246 *ibid*, 236

247 Blattner, William. *Heidegger's Being and Time*. 2006. 15

commodity modernity is thoroughly mired in Heidegger's concept of "*verfallensein*" or fallen-being/inauthentic-being. Yet, here an important distinction emerges between Heidegger and Tiqqun, as "*verfallen*" for Heidegger

does not express any negative evaluation, but is used to signify that Dasein is proximally and for the most part *alongside* the 'world' of its concern.²⁴⁸

In attempting to prevent this misreading of "*verfallen*" Heidegger writes that

we would also misunderstand the ontologico-existential structure of falling if we were to ascribe to it the sense of a bad and deplorable ontical property of which, perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves.²⁴⁹

Tiqqun diverges from this relatively passive treatment of falling away from Being, and their polemical position gives their rendering of "critical metaphysics" an overtly political tenor. They claim that beings under the domination of late-capitalist commodity modernity are

all just interchangeable symbols that re-

248 Heidegger, *Being and Time*. 1962. Print. 220

249 *ibid*, 220

place each other moving about on one plane; it's not that these symbols signify nothing, as the kindly morons of post-modernism like to think—indeed they signify *Nothingness* itself.”²⁵⁰

Here Tiqqun posits “Nothingness” as an ontological state inhabited by beings that have fallen from Being, and they clearly place an ethical judgment upon this form of existence. Tiqqun goes so far as to say that such beings are “the victims of a faint and constant loss of being.”²⁵¹ Thus, for Tiqqun, the social, economic, and philosophical implications of conventional metaphysics, modernity, and capitalism congeal to form what they call “the complete de-realization of the world.”²⁵²

Tiqqun argues that through this “complete de-realization of the world” beings that simply experience themselves as “being-there” or “being-in-the-world” (Dasein in traditional Heideggerian terms) are not encountering their fundamental relation to Being because the metaphysical landscape of commodity modernity has so fully fabricated itself that reality in such an

250 op cit, “What is Critical Metaphysics,” 7

251 ibid, 7

252 ibid, 7

existential episteme is not reality at all, but rather the complete embodiment of ontological “Nothingness.” Thus, in such an ontological void, “being-there” is viewed pejoratively; it is an existence trapped in an immanence that emerges within the void and “hollow conceptuality” of commodity modernity.²⁵³ For Tiqqun, the metaphysics which both emerges from such an ontological void and further entrenches its own “Nothingness” is a “metaphysics of negation,” “where there is no longer any response that goes beyond mere being-there.”²⁵⁴ This marks another major difference between Tiqqun and Heidegger, as Tiqqun’s aspirations to move beyond a “mere being-there” in commodity modernity is an explicit call for political transcendence—something that Heidegger’s thought explicitly rejects. Tiqqun claims that commodity modernity has produced a décor comprised purely of phenomena, of pure beings-there that are nothing beyond the simple fact that they are there, in their empty positivity, and which ceaselessly push humanity to feel ‘the marvel of marvels: that being-there’

253 *ibid*, 7

254 *ibid*, 7

(Heidegger, *What is Metaphysics?*)²⁵⁵

Here in their explicit critique of Heidegger, Tiqqun reasons that in a completely commodified world “being-there” as a “being-in-the-world” is not a realization of Being because such a world is not real in the simplest sense of the word.

Reality for Tiqqun “is the unity of meaning and life,”²⁵⁶ yet life underneath the domination of commodity modernity is fundamentally *meaningless*. Thus, unlike Heidegger’s a priori focus on Being, Tiqqun questions both Being and the world as two distinct but equal ontological realities. This is the explicit trajectory for Tiqqun’s critical metaphysics, in so far as the recognition of this existential *Nothingness* is a prerequisite to transcend the nihilism latent within commodity modernity. Tiqqun calls the recognition of this disjuncture between “meaning and life” *Total Otherness*. Only through the experience of this can a new *critical* metaphysics emerge. They claim:

This experience is the birth of metaphysics, where metaphysics appears precisely *as metaphysics*, where the world appears as the world. But metaphysics that arises

255 *ibid*, 7

256 *ibid*, 7

again there is not the same metaphysics that *people* [similar to the Heideggerian “THEY”] had hunted down and banished, because it returns as the truth and negation of what had defeated the old metaphysics: as a *conquering force*, as *critical Metaphysics*. Because the project of capitalist modernity *is nothing*, its realization is but the spreading desertification of everything that exists. And we are here to ravage that desert.²⁵⁷

Thus for Tiqqun, critical metaphysics attempts to negate commodity modernity’s metaphysics of negation—it is a negation of a negation, which assumes the timbre of a positivity.

Just as Heidegger argues that metaphysics has become a sordid exercise reflecting the technique of thought, rather than the act of thought itself, Tiqqun’s own reevaluation of the role of thinking becomes central to their critical metaphysics. Heidegger claims:

in order to learn how to experience the
aforementioned essence of thinking
purely [...] we must free ourselves from
the technical interpretation of thinking.
The beginnings of that interpretation

257 *ibid*, 7

reach back to Plato and Aristotle.²⁵⁸

Viewed in this way, thinking stands apart from itself as an act, and as such it appears to maintain a certain “autonomy over against acting and doing.”²⁵⁹ This paradigmatic shift accounts for post-Platonic philosophy’s need to “*justify its existence before the ‘sciences’*”²⁶⁰ by trying to pose itself as empirically or rationally validated. The problem with this technical interpretation of thinking (which according to Heidegger is the foundation of all Western philosophical thought) is that in its estrangement from itself as an act, it loses its fundamental essence of *thinking as thinking*. This is an error in so much as it is thinking itself that “lets itself be claimed by Being so that it can say the truth of Being.”²⁶¹ Thinking for Heidegger is inextricably paired with Being, because Being is what enables thinking. He claims that “thinking is the thinking of Being;”²⁶² from this, Being can be viewed as the “element” that enables thinking itself.

If thinking does not stem from Being, by reflexively questioning Being, then it in no way

258 op cit, “Letter on Humanism,” 218

259 ibid, 218

260 ibid, 218

261 ibid, 218

262 ibid, 220

corresponds to the essence of thinking which at its core is also the essence of Being. Thus, the technical interpretation of thinking as developed first by Plato and Aristotle and then at each stage in the empirical and rationalist mode of Western “thought,” is still caught in the grammatical/syntactical trap of the division between subject and object (most famously, in Descartes’s mind-body split). Heidegger claims that

when thinking comes to an end by slipping out of its element it replaces this loss by procuring itself as *techne* [...] One no longer thinks; one occupies oneself with ‘philosophy.’²⁶³

Thus, by reappropriating thinking from traditional metaphysics and the entirety of the rationalist tradition of philosophy, Heidegger attempts to recall thinking back into its fundamental essence, namely thinking as an act which questions, which is Being itself. The problem here becomes the constitution of the mode of disclosure that realizes thinking as *the thinking of Being*. Aware of this, Heidegger attempts to defend his argument against the charges that such a mode of disclosure of the truth of Being against rationalism must neces-

263 *ibid*, 221

sarily be irrational. He asks his critics' question for them: "Can then the effort to return thinking to its element be called 'irrationalism'?"²⁶⁴ Heidegger argues that even the presupposition of such a counter-argument is still firmly rooted in the inability of rationalist metaphysics to address the fundamental error of logic: namely its preoccupation with everything but Being itself. At this point in "Letter on Humanism" Heidegger expresses a certain comfort with contradiction. He argues that:

We are so filled with 'logic' that anything that disturbs the habitual somnolence of prevailing opinion is automatically registered as a despicable contradiction. We pitch everything that does not stay close to the familiar and beloved positive into the previously excavated pit of pure negation, which negates everything, ends in nothing, and so consummates nihilism. Following this logical course we let everything expire in a nihilism we invented for ourselves with the aid of logic.²⁶⁵

Here Heidegger's thought resonates strongly with Tiqqun's, in that Heidegger seems

264 *ibid*, 219

265 *ibid*, 250

to allude to the way in which logical rationality, carried to its furthest extreme, is merely nihilism itself, much as Tiqqun argues that the project of commodity modernity is the nihilistic “de-realization of the world.”

While these obvious similarities between Heidegger and Tiqqun’s evaluation of rational metaphysics and “commodity modernity’s” metaphysics of negation, Tiqqun and Heidegger differ in their prescriptions for what is to be done. Heidegger, adopting a hermeneutic approach, calls for the recovery of a language capable of apprehending Being. Tiqqun’s approach is similarly hermeneutic, referring to their Kabbalistic namesake, *tikkun*, as the “process—one of redemption, of the restoration of unity between meaning and life, the repair of all things *by the action of human beings*.”²⁶⁶ Thus, Tiqqun implicitly rejects Heidegger’s notion that beings can re-encounter Being itself by remaining open, ontologically standing in the “clearing” of Being and apprehending it, as too passive for “commodity modernity’s” domination. Being-in-the-world is already problematized for Tiqqun, because the world of commodity modernity is false, and thus a passive

266 op cit, “What is Critical Metaphysics?” 16

“openness” to Being in this context reinforces the latent nihilism within late-capitalism’s metaphysics of negation. Instead, Tiqqun argues that only the annihilation of nihilism itself can bring about the “restoration of unity between meaning and life” (ie Being itself), and thus “*Critical Metaphysics is the determined negation of commodity domination.*”²⁶⁷

For Tiqqun, thinking fulfills a similar role as it does in Heidegger, but they are much more explicit in viewing thinking as a necessary prerequisite to the transcendence of “commodity modernity,” whereas Heidegger argues that thinking is immanently Being itself. Tiqqun claims that thinking is the ontological act which attempts to reinscribe life-itself with meaning, for all pretensions toward meaning within commodity modernity are inherently commodified and thus false. Through thinking, one encounters critical metaphysics, and in doing so one transcends the nihilism inherent within late-capitalism. Tiqqun claims that “*everything, at the end of this era, leads one to believe that man can only survive in an environment that has meaning to it.*”²⁶⁸ Implicit within this statement

267 *ibid*, 16

268 *ibid*, 9

is the belief that meaning or even the act of meaning-making (this problematizes conventional conceptions of language as well) does not exist within commodity modernity. Thus, Tiqqun argues that everything that has masqueraded as thought, namely metaphysics, has ended up further proliferating and securing the domination of late-capitalist commodity relations. Heidegger seems to be content with leaving his critique at the level of metaphysics and Being alone, whereas Tiqqun adds a secondary dimension to their own critique: that of the political. Just as they attempt to undermine the falsity of traditional metaphysics, Tiqqun argues that because all existent forms of politics start on the foundation of such a false metaphysics then it follows that all existent forms of politics are false as well. Eschewing the metaphysics that upholds the false dichotomy of subject and object necessarily informs Tiqqun's rejection of all previous anticapitalist politics and their incessant need to establish some sort of "revolutionary subject." Tiqqun's politics is a positivity framed as a totalizing negativity, in that critical metaphysics is concerned with the complete destruction of late-capitalist nihilism. Any affirmation of a revolutionary subject within commod-

ity modernity is hopelessly caught in a closed, completely circumscribed, and controlled discourse of late-capitalist domination.

Tiqqun claims that the social and political apparatuses of late-capitalist domination are obfuscating real thinking. It is important, however to not read commodity modernity as an externalized object which actively oppresses, because doing so falls into a political dichotomy (oppressed/oppressor dynamic) that Tiqqun vehemently argues is now irrelevant at this stage of capitalism's development. Instead, Tiqqun's treatment of "apparatuses" (a concept Tiqqun borrows from Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben) is much more fluid in form. According to Agamben, these apparatuses are

literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings.²⁶⁹

Tiqqun argues that such apparatuses of control function discursively, and that therefore the living beings that are controlled by them often implicate or willingly engage themselves in the

269 Agamben, Giorgio. *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. 2009. 14

rhizomatic nature of such domination. Thus, apparatuses like these depend on the willing collusion of living beings to further inculcate control.

Thinking, for Tiqqun, is the act that calls into question these apparatuses of domination, self-imposed and otherwise. Posited against the “clearing” potential of thought (ie thinking as the realization of Being), is these apparatuses’ concerted effort to obfuscate the liberatory potential of thinking. Yet, by inverting this obfuscation, Tiqqun argues that it is precisely the effort of the apparatuses of commodity modernity to distract living beings from thought that validates thinking’s emancipatory nature. They argue that

nothing shows the extent to which the possibilities that mankind contains themselves tend towards mankind’s realization as does the effort our contemporaries put into distracting themselves from them.²⁷⁰

Thus, the realization of Being is suppressed by distracting living beings from the pure potentiality and possibility that is Being.

Tiqqun is explicit that beings need to engage in real thinking as a way out of commodity modernity. They write

270 *op cit*, “What is Critical Metaphysics?” 9

thinking is not a duty of man, but his essential necessity, the non-fulfillment of which is suffering—that is, a contradiction between his possibilities and his existence.²⁷¹

It is this “contradiction” between possibilities and existence that forms the basis of life within late-capitalist commodity modernity. Heidegger also addresses this split between possibilities and existence in his arguments for “the thinking that thinks the truth of Being.”²⁷² Heidegger introduces the concept of “valuing” which he argues is fundamentally an act of “subjectivizing.” He claims “every valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivizing. It does not let beings: be.”²⁷³ Tiqqun follows this trajectory of thought by arguing that in commodity modernity ethical inclinations have been codified into moral values, and these subjectivized strictures do not allow for the realization of Being. Any acquiescence to subjectivizing claims of value is a closing—a restriction of potentiality and possibilities. Thus, as Tiqqun claims, “the renunciation of thought is the first

271 *ibid*, 9

272 *op cit*, “Letter on Humanism,” 251

273 *ibid*, 251

condition for ‘fitting in socially’.”²⁷⁴ They argue that the adoption of values, in a *valueless* society with a nihilistic death-drive, is the obfuscation of thinking and by extension the de-realization of Being.

Tiqqun’s position on the role of thinking leads to their interpretation of language and its function within commodity modernity. They claim that

those who believe they can build a new world without building a new language are fooling themselves: the whole of this world is contained in its language.²⁷⁵

This echoes Heidegger’s own thoughts on language as he claims that

it is proper to think the essence of language from its correspondence to Being and indeed as this correspondence, that is, as the home of man’s essence [...] language is the house of Being.²⁷⁶

Reappropriating language from traditional metaphysics means encountering a nearness to Being. The problem that Heidegger outlines here is that language, in traditional metaphysics, is

274 op cit, “What is Critical Metaphysics?” 10

275 ibid, 20

276 op cit, “Letter on Humanism,” 237

what makes an individual being a subject according to its innate grammatical structures.

At a base grammatical and syntactical level language creates a distinction between the subject and the object. The subject is the grammatical concept that *does* the predicate *to* the object. This split allows traditional metaphysics to understand the subject's being in relation to the object-based world (ie other beings-as-objects) around it, rather than concerning itself with the more fundamental question of Being itself. Language is what allows for this confusion, this forgetting of Being, yet paradoxically because it is the "house of Being" it is also individual beings' only means to get near to Being itself, to exist as Dasein. This first interpretation of language is of a language that has fallen out of its element as the "house of Being." Along these lines, Heidegger claims that this

downfall of language is, however, not the grounds for, but already a consequence of, the state of affairs in which language under the dominance of the modern metaphysics of subjectivity almost irremediably falls out of its element. Language still denies us its essence: that it is

the house of the truth of Being.²⁷⁷ Thus, the language of the metaphysics of subjectivity, the very metaphysics Heidegger is attempting to overcome, is “almost irremediably” out of its element as language is the true essence of Being. Implicit within his critique of the language of traditional metaphysics is that a new language freed from the metaphysics of subjectivity and its propensity towards logic and rationality can be used to truly ask the question of Being and subsequently encounter its truth in such a freeing or clearing. As Heidegger scholar Michael Inwood claims,

language [for Heidegger] is not a free-floating thing in which we all share. It seems to float freely, since it belongs to no particular DASEIN, it belongs initially to the They. But we do not have to speak only as They speak. One can, by a mastery of words or by fresh understanding of one’s subject-matter, appropriate language in an original way.²⁷⁸

Remedying language’s seemingly irremediable falling-out of its fundamental essence is clearly part of Tiqqun’s own project of linguis-

277 *ibid*, 222

278 Inwood, Michael. *A Heidegger Dictionary*. 1999. 114

tic restoration. Tiqqun argues that “language is not a system of symbols, but the promise of a reconciliation between words and things.”²⁷⁹ Tiqqun claims that the language of commodity modernity emerged from the equivalence latent within commodity relations (ie Marx’s commodity fetishism). They write that

once commodity mysticism, which *formally* and *externally* postulated the general equivalence of everything and the universal interchangeability of all, proved itself to be a pure negation, a morbid official takeover, *people* resolved to make all things *really* equivalent, and beings *inwardly* exchangeable.²⁸⁰

Through this generalized equivalence a closing off of Being occurs, as each utterance of interchangeability is a reduction of all potentiality and possibility. Thus, for Tiqqun, language is at once the means in which the world is experienced, but it is also that which abstracts, and all abstraction is a move away from the understanding that “reality is the unity of meaning and life.”²⁸¹ Therefore, Tiqqun asserts that

279 op cit, “What is Critical Metaphysics?” 12

280 ibid, 13

281 ibid, 12

critical thought is thought that brings about an exit from nihilism, starting from a profane transcendence of language and the world. What is transcendental to critical thought is that *the world exists*, and what is unspeakable is *that there is a language there*.²⁸²

While this is no longer in line with Heideggerian thought, Tiqqun nonetheless makes the case for the transcendence of the language and world of commodity modernity. Through this, a new language of Being emerges as that which is “open to the *experience* of meaning” which is the condition for and result of this world’s annihilation.

Perhaps the most glaring difference between Heidegger and Tiqqun is the latter’s conception of transcendence as essential to their critical metaphysics. Underlying their whole ontological project is the idea that “all of human life is but a bet on transcendence.”²⁸³ Tiqqun’s use of the word signifies an achieving of a reality outside of this one. Heidegger’s writing points to precisely the opposite, for he does not view Being as something *beyond* the world—Being is purely immanent *within* the world. This being-

282 *ibid*, 12

283 *ibid*, 12

in-the-world for Heidegger is a manifestation of pure immanence because

only Dasein is in the world, and the adjective ‘worldly’ (*weltlich*), with the abstract noun ‘worldliness, worldhood’ (*Weltlichkeit*), can be applied only to Dasein, and to features of Dasein, such as the world itself. Non-human entities are said to be ‘within the world’ [...] but never ‘worldly’ or ‘in the world’.²⁸⁴

Heidegger claims that

for us ‘world’ does not at all signify beings or any realm of beings but the openness of Being. Man is, and is man, insofar as he is the ek-sisting one. He stands out into the openness of Being.²⁸⁵

World is merely the “openness of Being” and therefore the world is only the world for Dasein. Simply because the world is only understandable in its relationship to Dasein, no externality exists from which a transcendent understanding of metaphysics may emerge. It is immanent in so far as in recognizing and understanding the truth of Being, Dasein is realized, and this realization (even though it is a *recovering*) is ulti-

284 op cit, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 246

285 op cit, “Letter on Humanism,” 252

mately being-in-the-world.

Against Heidegger's conception of Being as immanent, Tiqqun views critical metaphysics as

the doctrine of transcendence which alone permits a liberation from and annihilation of this world [...] and affirms itself as the *determined* negation of commodity domination, and simultaneously it *already* contains, in its present manifestations, the positive transcendence that goes beyond the zones of destruction.²⁸⁶

In this sense, Tiqqun conceives of transcendence as that which overcomes nihilism and the world of commodity modernity as they are one and the same. Throughout "What is Critical Metaphysics?" Tiqqun claims that to overcome or transcend the nihilism of commodity modernity, one must adopt a nihilism aiming at the total negation of commodity modernity's nihilism. This negation of the negation is a positivity.

Tiqqun writes that critical metaphysics presents itself as a general injunction to determine oneself *starting* from the metaphysical character of the world, it constitutes by its own tra-

286 op cit, "What is Critical Metaphysics?" 18

jectory the *fulfillment* and the *transcendence* of nihilism.²⁸⁷

Tiqqun's view is that the world is entirely fabricated and false. Therefore they would argue against Heidegger's immanence as the openness of being-in-the-world, because their understanding of the illusory nature of commodity modernity would by extension preclude any authentic Being in such an inauthentic world. While this seems to be a point of divergence between Tiqqun and Heidegger, they do agree on the need to appropriate metaphysics back from rational philosophy (Heidegger) and late-capitalism (Tiqqun). Tiqqun quotes a lengthy passage from Heidegger's *Contribution to the Question of Being* which illustrates this trajectory of thought:

In the first place it's about distancing yourself from the world as it is in representation; it 'appears at first as a transcendence of metaphysics...But what happens in the appropriation of metaphysics, and there alone, is rather that the truth of metaphysics comes flooding back, the lasting truth of an apparently repudiated metaphysics, which is nothing else but its henceforth re-appropriated *essence*: its *Dwelling*. What's

happening here is something different from a restoration of metaphysics' (Heidegger, *Contribution to the Question of Being*).²⁸⁸

This concern with the representation of the world forms the basis for Tiqqun's understanding of transcendence, and informs their explicit calls to reappropriate essence or Being through a reappropriation of metaphysics that they call critical metaphysics.

For Tiqqun, as for Heidegger, the concern about the world as "it is in representation" is a problematized post-Enlightenment concern with the relation of individual beings to the "objective" world. This "representation" of the world is no longer seen as a representation, and instead the representation becomes the thing itself. This is what Heidegger critiques as a failing of logical/rational/empirical thought, as well as what Tiqqun critiques as the *modus operandi* of late-capitalist commodity modernity. Post-Enlightenment thought is focused on the individual-as-subject, which therefore entrenches a metaphysics of subjectivity. In his essay "The Age of the World Picture" Heidegger writes that, through this metaphysics of subjectivity, "the very essence of man itself changes,

288 *ibid*, 19

in that man becomes subject.”²⁸⁹ This metaphysics of subjectivity views as its subject of inquiry the relations between the individual-as-subject to other externalized subjects (now made into objects), yet as Heidegger argues, this metaphysics is therefore no longer concerned with the question of Being itself and instead contents itself with the representation of relations between beings. Tiqqun argues that this actually supports their case for transcendence, as it lays the foundation for a world in which man has “been trying to drown himself in immanence and has failed to do so”²⁹⁰

For Tiqqun, metaphysics in commodity modernity is merely a metaphysics of negation which furthers an individual’s alienation from Being. Therefore, for Tiqqun, immanence is a pejorative, inasmuch as it starts from the world as it is without bothering to question such a tenuous foundation, namely that the world of commodity modernity is one totally and completely known only in its representation. As a way out of this trap of immanence, Tiqqun argues that:

Critical Metaphysics is *rage* to such de-

289 “The Age of the World Picture.” *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. 1977. 115-154. 128

290 op cit, “What is Critical Metaphysics?” 10

gree of accumulation that it becomes a *viewpoint*. But such a viewpoint, one that has recovered from all the beguilements of modernity, does not know the world as distinct from itself. It *sees* that in their typical forms materialism and idealism have had their day [...] and that even where *people* seems to be flourishing in the most satisfied immanence, consciousness is still present, as an inaudible feeling of decay, as *bad conscience*.²⁹¹

Here immanence is the condition in which individual beings live as subjects within the totality of commodity modernity. Yet, Tiqqun allows that cracks in this “satisfied immanence” do indeed appear, and consciousness (similar here to Heidegger’s “thinking”) manifests itself as the impending feeling of collapse, decay, and bad conscience. It is within these spaces that consciousness re-emerges (not the consciousness of a revolutionary subject, but rather, *consciousness itself*), and through such fissures (those open to an *outside*) critical metaphysics manifests to transcend the nihilism of late-capitalism by revealing it for what it is: *nothingness itself*.

291 *ibid*, 9

Both Heidegger and Tiqqun attempt to elucidate the ways in which traditional metaphysics distances individual beings from Being itself. Heidegger argues that a metaphysics of subjectivity has taken root as the logical extension of rational post-Enlightenment philosophy and it is precisely because of this rationality that thinking has become codified, institutionalized, and empiricized. The casualty of this logic-based approach to subjective-experience is that traditional metaphysics concerns itself with the relation of beings to the objects that they encounter without thinking about the more fundamental relation of beings to Being itself. Tiqqun takes this problematic view of traditional metaphysics view further and argues that metaphysics in the contemporary moment of capitalism's historical development is ultimately a metaphysics of *nothingness*. They argue that the post-Enlightenment project of progressive rationalization is fully realized in commodity modernity and thus, it is the de-realization of the world and the actualization of nihilism. While Tiqqun borrows much from Heidegger's critiques of traditional metaphysics, there are nonetheless many irreconcilable theoretical divergences between their two respective approaches (ie Tiqqun's insistence on

transcendence is incompatible with Heidegger's immanence). Tiqqun ultimately acknowledges, in a way that Heidegger's thinking never would, the political necessity to realize the antithesis to the nihilism of commodity modernity: a *transcendent* critical metaphysics. Moving beyond Heidegger's critical evaluation of traditional metaphysics, Tiqqun fashions critical metaphysics as the only metaphysical *force* capable of *transcending-by-destroying* the relations inherent in commodity modernity, the act which reunifies meaning and life (ie the realization of Being).

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Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee, while clearly informed by academic discourses (such as traditional **metaphysics**, theories of **sovereignty**, the study of **biopolitics** and disciplinary practices, etc), are staunchly **defiant** of the academy's monopoly over political thought. It is at once an **appropriation, recontextualization**, and a **liberation** of certain theoretical concepts from the **tautological trap** of academia and their subsequent projection into the world. In this way, Tiqqun and The Invisible Committee represent a **critical synthesis** of theoretical spaces as disparate and diverse as anarchist thought, Italian autonomist-Marxism from the 1970s, French ultra-gauche communism, the squatter's movement in Europe in the 1980s, and the Situationist International.



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